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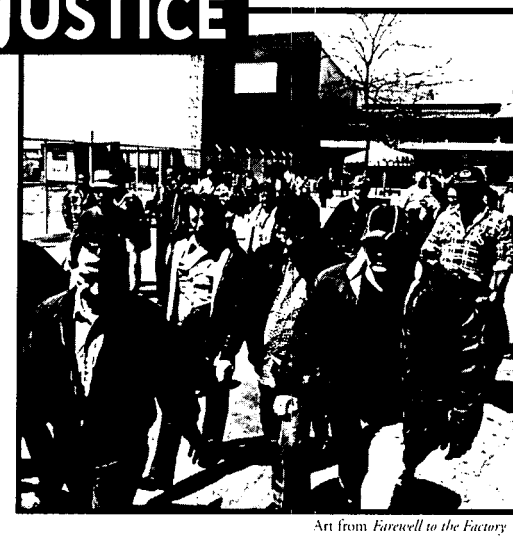

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Editor's Page

DISSENT BEGINS the new year—and moves toward the new millennium—with a new look. It is our second "make-over" in forty-four years. We think it is fresh and attractive, and we hope our readers agree. ■ In *Dissent*'s first issue, its founders proposed to "bring together intellectual sentiment against the blight of conformism." It's still our aim since, regrettably, this blight remains very much with us. So *Dissent* continues to question buzzwords—and buzz-ideas. But not by asserting left-wing dogma as the alternative to right-wing clichés or to what might be called "sectarian centrism." (The sectarian centrist, a strange creature of the Clinton-Blair universe, is usually a Democrat or a Laborite who accepts the bottom lines drawn by Reagan-Thatcher and brands any skeptic to the left as insufficiently "modernized.") That democratic socialist George Orwell had it right when he wrote, "The enemy is the gramophone mind, whether or not one agrees with the record that is being played at the moment." ■ A *Dissent* left is many-sided and perpetually revisionist. It is a left that affirms while it demurs, as Michael Walzer does in arguing for the importance of pluralism in social democratic thinking. Liberty, equality, and solidarity, he contends, depend on "the vitality of associational life." Walzer asks readers to imagine a "cooperative commonwealth" in which individuals have many options before them, "free from the domination of the wellborn, the wealthy, and the powerful." Now that's an idea that doesn't conform to our times. ■ Gramophone minds have, of late, been especially noisy about markets. They are, we're told, nature's panacea for all ills. In this issue, James B. Rule debunks market utopianism, warning that it is often "a Trojan horse" for anti-egalitarian policies. On the other hand, he insists that markets do have real value—"in their place." ■ Another fashionable, although deceptive, refrain is "family values." It usually has less to do with the concerns of today's family life than with putting women back "in place." Or rather, in time, roughly 1950. *Dissent* continues its discussion of feminism with Alix Kates Shulman's reexamination of her controversial "Marriage Agreement" of 1969, proposing equality between the sexes in child care and housework. ■ Paul Berman vivisects a shrill gramophone mind in "A Fanatic's Journey." *Dissent* readers know the type—the rancorous leftist who converts to rancorous rightist, just switching records, never skipping a beat (merely a thought. . . or two). ■ It's worth noting which forms of fanaticism become part of "normalcy" in times of conformity. A little polyphony makes a good antidote.

-M.C.

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Winter 1998

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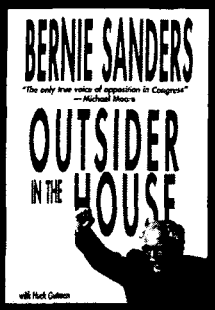

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Labor's Roller-Coaster Ride

Harold Meyerson

TWO YEARS into the Sweeney era, the American labor movement seems to have found its own rather rocky rhythm: victory, disaster, victory, disaster. In late summer, the stunning success of the Teamsters strike at United Parcel Service was followed by guilty pleas from three top officials of the scandal-rocked campaign of Teamsters president Ron Carey. In November, labor's watershed victory over the administration's fast-track proposal was followed, just one week later, by the ruling from retired federal judge Kenneth Conboy barring Carey from seeking reelection. One week after that, Carey went on a "temporary, unpaid leave of absence."

It is not to make light of the growing Carey scandal to note that this distinctive Sweeney-time rhythm is vastly preferable to the pattern of events in Lane Kirkland's era: decline, disaster, decline, disaster. The comparison is not as gratuitous as it first may seem, since the erstwhile Kirkland apparatchiks—largely forgotten but not altogether gone since they lost control of the AFL-CIO in 1995—are using the Carey scandal both to assault the Sweeney regime and paint a glowing and unrecognizable picture of its predecessor.

For the Kirkland coven, of course, the original sin of Sweeneyism is ideological. As baldly stated by the *Forward*'s Jonathan Mahler on the *Wall Street Journal* op-ed page, the problem with Sweeney is that he and his ilk have reached out to the left (what's left of it), to suspect characters like leaders of the women's and environmental movements, to foreign unions that failed to pass muster with Jay Lovestone in 1959—in short, that Michael Harrington has replaced Lovestone and Max Shachtman as the household deity of the AFL-CIO.

The transformation has had all manner of ramifications, the most serious of which, as the Shachtmanites see it, is that a number of Shachtmanites have lost their jobs at the Federation. What the Friends of Lane omit from this tale is that only those functionaries who were obstacles to the creation of the vibrant new organizing, political, and field programs of Sweeney's Federation were let go, and that the original sin of Kirklandism, as the Sweeney people saw it, was less ideology than narcolepsy. Manning the ideological battlements taxed the Kirklandites to the utmost; on all other issues of concern to labor, they slept.

THE CAREY scandal is a godsend to Sweeney's critics, though, because Carey's campaign was a cause célèbre for the democratic left, and it is the left where the scandal is now wreaking havoc. There were excellent reasons why Carey won the left's allegiance. In his five years heading the Teamsters, Carey seemingly had broken the back of the mob. He had placed seventy mobbed-up locals—about 10 percent of the union—into trusteeship. He had stopped the time-honored practice of officials pulling down multiple salaries. He had assembled one of the smartest and most successful organizing departments in the movement. At UPS, he had waged a genuine classic of a strike: polling the members on their preference of issues; building the strike around their number-one priority—upgrading the income and status of part-time workers; mobilizing and uniting over 150,000 strikers across the country; winning a level of public support for strikers unseen in the last thirty years; and eventually winning the strike.

But Carey's tenure was threatened in 1996 when the Teamster Old Guard found a candi-

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date with the magic name of Hoffa. And when it looked like Hoffa (James Jr.) might prevail unless Carey came up with some last-minute truckloads of mailings, Carey's campaign began to move money around in ways that were plainly illegal. Conboy's report makes it clear that Carey would have to have been unconscious not to have known at least the broad outlines of what transpired. The key transaction, a $485,000 Teamsters contribution to Citizen Action that was secretly to be rebated to the Carey campaign, was so outlandishly outsized—it was eighty times larger than any previous Teamsters contribution to the group, and constituted a hefty chunk of the Teamsters' treasury—that almost no one at Teamsters headquarters was willing to approve it as it moved through channels. Despite credible testimony to the contrary, though, Carey insists no one called it to his attention.

Worse yet, the problem does not end with Carey. Conboy's report details how $150,000 in Teamsters money was passed on to Citizen Action and then back to the Carey campaign through an even more supercharged connection: the AFL-CIO. Carey campaign consultant Martin Davis alleges that Rich Trumka, the Federation's charismatic secretary-treasurer, agreed to pass on the Teamsters funds. Somewhat less explosively, Trumka, American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees president Gerald McEntee, and Service Employees International Union president Andy Stern are alleged to have agreed to raise $50,000 apiece for Carey's candidacy. Trumka and McEntee, the report asserts, at least partly delivered, though it contains no assertion that Stern actually raised any money at all.

The seriousness of these latter allegations is unclear. On one hand, the law that bans employers from donating to union candidacies has never been construed to apply with criminal liability to a union leader for soliciting contributions. The practice is not unheard of: in the mid-eighties, Kirkland himself helped raise money for then-United Mine Workers president Sam Church in his unsuccessful effort to stave off the insurgent campaign of a young reformer named Rich Trumka. On the other hand, this election was conducted under a court order with more explicit sanctions on fundraising.

More broadly, even if the criminal liability in the case is limited to the parties who have already pleaded guilty, the damage to labor's image, not to mention its good name, will be substantial. Republican Peter Hoekstra will chair hearings this winter that are likely to provide a mix of reform rhetoric and old-fashioned union bashing. For their part, Sweeney's critics will use the allegations to damn the entire Sweeney reformation.

The irony here is considerable, for it is precisely the reform wing of labor that now stands accused of shady dealings in the effort to stave off the re-Hoffazation of the Teamsters. In his insurgent campaign for the presidency of the Mine Workers, for instance, Trumka took no contributions save those from Mine Workers members. Ed James, an attorney who, Conboy reports, donated $16,000 to Carey, came out of the old Miners for Democracy group, ran Ed Sadlowski's insurgent campaign for the presidency of the Steelworkers, and is the author of a seminal article on union democracy. In his year at the helm of SEIU, Stern has devoted more resources to organizing and hired more organizers than any union president possibly since John L. Lewis; no one other than Sweeney has done more to transform the culture of American labor from a quiet service organization to a militant mobilizing machine.

In the two brief years of Sweeney's tenure, the record of that machine is already quite impressive. Compare, for instance, Sweeney's success at derailing "fast-track" with Kirkland's failure four years ago to stop NAFTA. In 1993, unemployment and economic anxiety were high, presumably friendly Democrats controlled Congress, and labor was joined in its fight by the nationalist right in the persons of Pat Buchanan and Ross Perot. This time out, unemployment and economic anxiety had subsided, free-trade Republicans were running the Congress, and the anti-free-trade coalition had lost its nationalist component. The only thing labor had going for it this time around was that Lane Kirkland's movement had become John Sweeney's, and that, it turned out, made all the difference.

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Sweeney's movement already had coordinators in swing congressional districts, left over from its massive 1996 election operation. It placed ads in the districts of wavering congressional representatives. Member unions such as the Teamsters and the Steelworkers conducted mass lobbying campaigns. Above all, at a time when every other source of funds and volunteers within the Democratic Party had largely atrophied, the labor movement could promise to deliver, or withhold, both, with a credibility to which the Kirkland regime could barely aspire. Clearly, it is no longer accurate to say that labor failed in its 1996 election ventures. Though the Democrats did not retake the Hill, the Republicans have shied from advancing major new initiatives, and the Democrats thought twice about supporting the administration's latest free-trade panacea.

THE TRIUMPHS and travails of the new-model labor movement illustrate a motif that runs through contemporary liberalism—and runs like this: genuine mass mobilization of the sort that Sweeney & Co. have now embarked upon requires resources. And perversely, gearing up a people-based politics often throws you back on the same old money-based politics you're trying to escape.

In the mid-eighties in California, then-Senator Alan Cranston hired legendary United Farm Workers organizer Marshall Ganz to rebuild within the state Democratic Party the vibrant culture of volunteerism that had characterized the party of Cranston's youth. But Ganz's network took money to build, and Cranston got that money from savings-and-loan swindler Charles Keating, for whom he then felt obliged to do the favors that ultimately spelled an end to his career and to Ganz's program.

Rebuilding the culture of mobilization, of course, is what John Sweeney's labor movement and Ron Carey's Teamsters were all about. But while Carey was building an impressive level of strike solidarity and organizing zeal, he neglected his own network of supporters within the Teamsters. He failed to sustain an internal operation that could raise money from rank and filers, and when he came up short, his campaign fell back on the old-style mobilization of money rather than the harder work of mobilizing volunteers.

And it apparently funneled that money through Citizen Action, whose name had come to belie, at least at the level of the national organization, what this once grassroots organization had in fact become. Shortly after the 1996 election, I met with Citizen Action executive director Ira Arlook, who told me excitedly of the hundreds of thousands of phone calls on behalf of Democratic candidates that Citizen Action had made in the final weekend of the campaign. "How many volunteers did you have making these calls?" I asked Arlook. "None," he answered. "These were all paid phone banks"—paid with union money, the bulk of it legit, but some to be siphoned back to the Carey campaign.

The action at Citizen Action involved only money, not citizens. The reformation at the Teamsters apparently relied upon the illegal use of Teamsters funds. And in seeking to consolidate the rebirth of the broad labor movement, some of the movement's leading lights may have been complicit in the campaign to save Carey by any means possible. The trade union movement in America has a long record of self-inflicted wounds. The Sweeney regime has managed to change a great deal in a short time, but the movement's proclivity for self-subversion, alas, continues unabated. ●

HAROLD MEYERSON is executive editor of the *L.A. Weekly*.

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"Fast-Track" Derailed

Mark Levinson

THIS FALL President Clinton made "fast-track" negotiating authority—whereby Congress must vote yes or no on trade agreements presented by the president, with no amendments allowed—his top legislative priority. The prospects for passage looked good. Every major newspaper supported it; the business community lobbied for it; the president was at the peak of his popularity; and he pledged to work with the Republican majority in Congress in order to pass it.

Yet in a stunning setback for the president, fast-track was defeated. Most embarrassing for the president was that more than 80 percent of Democrats in the House of Representatives opposed him. Never before in this century has a president been rejected by his own party in such large numbers.

Most press reports tied the defeat of fast-track to the importance of union political contributions to Democrats in the House of Representatives. This explanation misses the significance of the vote. It is true that many Democrats are dependent on labor for campaign funds. But if political contributions determined the outcome, fast-track would have passed easily. Corporate political contributions outpace labor's by a ratio of eleven to one, and the disparity is growing. The focus on labor's political contributions shifts attention away from the real reason for the defeat—widespread public dissatisfaction with a failed trade policy. Four years ago, supporters of the North American Free Trade Agreement promised economic benefits, which have not materialized for the majority of people.

NAFTA is not simply a trade agreement; it is a trade and *investment* agreement. The problem with NAFTA is not that it reduces tariffs, but that it protects the interests of capital while ignoring the rights of labor. NAFTA protects investors by prohibiting restrictions on business activities, such as local content requirements for manufactured goods, transfer of technology agreements, and laws specifying the nationality of senior management—all of which had been characteristic of Mexican policy before NAFTA. NAFTA also required Mexico to change its law governing intellectual property rights to something approximating American standards. Violations are subject to drastic penalties.

In contrast, provisions governing workers' rights and environmental standards were relegated to side agreements. The procedures for enforcement of the labor and environmental agreements are so ill defined and convoluted as to render them ineffective. NAFTA defends Bill Gates's right to enjoy royalties on his software but does not defend the rights of the women and men who manufacture it.

WITH ITS strong protections for investors and weak side agreements on workers' rights and the environment, NAFTA creates incentives for companies to abandon workers here and move jobs across the border. NAFTA shifts the balance of power between employers and workers. It has cost the jobs of hundreds of thousands of workers and undermined the job security of millions more. This is one reason why, despite a seven-year economic recovery, wages for most workers are lower than at the last peak of the business cycle in 1989.

Guess, Inc. provides a startling example of the pressures at work. When workers attempted to organize a union and the Labor Department began to enforce overtime and minimum wage laws, Guess started moving its production to Mexico. The message is clear. If the U.S. government takes steps to enforce U.S.

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labor laws, and if American workers exercise their right to form a union, companies will flee, leaving thousands of workers jobless, countless others afraid to ask too much from their employers, and government agencies wondering whether or not to enforce our laws aggressively.

Fast-track was defeated because the president proposed a version of it that had the same problems as NAFTA; it protected corporate interests—though rules and strong enforcement mechanisms defending investors and intellectual property rights—while ignoring workers' rights and environmental concerns.

POLLS SHOWED that Americans overwhelmingly rejected extending this kind of trade agreement. By nearly two to one the public opposed fast-track. Rank-and-file Republicans opposed it in greater numbers than Democrats did. Almost three-quarters of all Americans thought that trade agreements should aim to lift labor standards for workers in other countries and protect the environment.

Even a majority of the so-called New Democrats affiliated with the Democratic Leadership Council—which raised corporate money to support fast-track—voted against it. As Rep. Timothy Roemer (D-Ind.), a leader of the New Democrats, put it, "We have low unemployment in Indiana, but thousands of people are hanging on by their fingernails to $6- and $7-an-hour jobs, and they could be the first ones displaced. . . . I'm a free-trader, but I insist on fair trade." NAFTA has not been the answer to Mexico's problems either. In fact, NAFTA contributed to one of the worst economic crises in Mexico's history. Since the passage of NAFTA, real manufacturing wages have fallen 25 percent in Mexico.

To anyone who was listening—which, based on most press reports, doesn't appear to include the media—the labor movement's message was clear: *the issue was not whether to trade, but how to trade. The labor movement was not advocating protectionism, it was arguing that global rules of trade should protect people as well as property; that core labor standards—such as the right to free association and collective bargaining—and environmental standards should have the same status in trade agreements as protections for investors.*

Supporters of fast-track have a hard time explaining why labor rights should not be included in trade agreements. They tend to avoid the issue. The president argued that fast-track was vital to American leadership (a vacuous phrase). He posed the choice as one between free trade and protectionism, between opening new markets and building walls. But the public didn't buy it. The scare tactics and claims by fast-track proponents that "other countries won't trade with us unless we agree to fast-track" and "Europe and Japan will beat us to the punch in South America" were easily refuted. Our trade with non-NAFTA countries in South America has exploded in recent years. Without fast-track authority, U.S. exports to Chile grew almost twice as fast as the European Union's exports to Chile between 1990 and 1996.

Despite the defeat of fast-track, the integration of the global economy will proceed. Now, however, there is an opening for a long-overdue debate on *how* this should occur. The NAFTA model of integration allows multinational corporations to profit from a country's policy of suppressing free trade unions in order to gain competitive advantage in attracting foreign investment. The result is lower standards throughout the world. The alternative to the NAFTA model is to raise standards by creating a new virtuous circle: workers' rights leading to higher wages, which translate into more sales, new investment, and job growth. The way to start is by incorporating workers' rights and environmental standards into all trade and investment agreements. ●

MARK LEVINSON is the chief economist at the Union of Needletrades, Industrial, and Textile Employees (UNITE).

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Promise Keepers on the Mall

Leo P. Ribuffo

MANY READERS of *Dissent* may associate mass demonstrations in Washington with liberal or radical gatherings such as the 1963 civil rights march or later protests against U.S. intervention in Indochina and Central America. But political and cultural conservatives have an equally established tradition of rallying in the capital. In 1979, for instance, Jerry Falwell's "I Love America" rally at the Capitol served as a prelude to the founding of the Moral Majority. And because Washington represents the "geographic soul of America," Bill McCartney, founder and CEO of Promise Keepers (PK), chose the Mall as the site for "Stand in the Gap: A Sacred Assembly of Men" on October 4, 1997.

Not since scandal brought down Jim Bakker and the PTL (Praise the Lord) Club a decade ago has a conservative religious group received as much concentrated media coverage as Promise Keepers in the week before the assembly. Thus PK's emergence provides an opportunity to evaluate current trends among theologically conservative Protestants, the latest tactical turns by the Christian political right, the quality of reporting and punditry about these matters, and the left's response.

As McCartney readily confesses, he was moved to found Promise Keepers in 1991 by his own sense of failure as a husband and father. Raised a Roman Catholic, he became a Protestant charismatic (as many Pentecostals now prefer to call themselves) in the early 1970s, yet continued to neglect his family in favor of his career as football coach at the University of Colorado. Society is suffering a "cultural breakdown," McCartney concluded, because millions of other men are similarly inattentive or worse. As evidence of this breakdown, he cites crime, pornography, drug abuse, violence against women, and racial prejudice. The answer is to bring men together, to bring them to Jesus Christ, and to bring them back to their families. Then the men will become "bulwarks against people's ill-informed and destructive choices like offensive linemen protecting the quarterback."

The title of the assembly comes from Chapter 22 of the Book of Ezekiel, in which divine wrath descends because no moral men appear to "stand in the gap" before God. McCartney himself occasionally mentions that America's sins may provoke God's judgment, but he has revealed little sustained interest in premillennial Bible prophecy. As anyone with access to cable television can discover daily, most fundamentalists and many evangelicals try to infer from Scripture whether judgment is imminent, whether Christians will endure much "tribulation," and whether Jews will convert en masse before Jesus' return. McCartney's focus is on moral regeneration in the meantime.

Self-conscious heirs to the American revivalist tradition, PK leaders look back especially to the Second Great Awakening of the early 1800s, in which converted laymen began to supersede educated clergy. The PK commemorative New Testament distributed on the Mall reprints the seven signs of a spiritual awakening discerned by Charles Finney, an obscure lawyer turned famous preacher during that Awakening. Indeed, PK's occasional lapses into contemporary psychobabble should not obscure the fact that they are not only dealing with old evangelical problems, but also using old evangelical techniques.

Women have been numerically dominant in Protestant congregations for at least two centuries. Diverse clergy and lay people have frequently tried to bring in men by highlight-

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ing a masculine Christianity. In *The Man Nobody Knows* (1925), the theologically liberal ad man Bruce Barton presented Jesus as a sturdy and sociable business statesman. At roughly the same time, fundamentalist evangelist Billy Sunday, a former baseball player, shadowboxed the devil at his revivals, welcomed college students with their football fight songs, and appealed for "coachers" to bring faltering souls from second base to salvation at home plate.

CONTROVERSY ABOUT the assembly on the Mall centered on two issues. First, is Promise Keepers essentially a conservative *political* project? According to Alfred Ross and Lee Cokorinos of the Center for Democracy Studies, PK represented the "most sophisticated political movement the right has conjured up." Another organization that monitors far-right activities, Political Research Associates, warned that PK's ultimate goal is "theocracy." Moreover, members are expected to meet each week with "shepherds," who may want to press them into political action. Equal Partners in Faith, a group of theological and political liberals including Peter Laarman, Rosemary Radford Ruether, and Arthur Waskow, noted that PK endorses racial "reconciliation" without advocating the social programs necessary to eradicate institutional racism. All of these critics complained that the mainstream news media scarcely mentioned PK's political side.

Certainly McCartney is politically very conservative. He not only opposes abortion, but has spoken on behalf of Operation Rescue, probably the most inflammatory antiabortion group. Similarly, in 1992 he endorsed a proposed Colorado constitutional amendment restricting local bans on discrimination against gays. McCartney also received contributions, publicity, or moral support from far-right leaders Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, James Dobson, and Gary Bauer. The PK leadership contains many lesser known but equally conservative clergy. McCartney and his colleagues periodically issue sweeping condemnations of liberal, feminist, and "Satanist" opponents.

Only in the abstract world of the tax code and campaign finance regulations is there a clear distinction between political and nonpolitical activity. Just as an Anti-Saloon League meeting was a good place to find committed Republicans in the 1910s and a CIO local was a good place to find staunch Democrats in the 1930s, PK assemblies attract many supporters of the Christian right. It remains to be seen, however, whether or not the organization will expand the ranks of conservative voters or campaign workers.

The second question, whether or not Promise Keepers reinforces patriarchy, is also problematic. Although PK leaders unquestionably endorse a male-headed family, the version of manhood promoted looks less than patriarchal. If husbands and wives cannot reach agreement, then the man must make the final decision, but he should do so "gently and in a sweet spirit," McCartney wrote recently in the Heritage Foundation's *Policy Review*. He never repudiated that position as controversy grew yet seemed increasingly uncomfortable asserting it. Instead of even sweet unilateralism, he preferred "give-and-take" between marital "teammates." Nor should any man act like a "predator," "tyrant," or "loner." And McCartney sympathized with "ladies" who were suspicious of Promise Keepers because men, especially men in groups, often behaved irresponsibly.

The assembly itself provided information for refining these questions but no definitive answers. The meeting on the Mall was neither a political rally nor an immense therapy group for male bonding, but rather a religious service—a service considerably more emotional than the formulaic revivals led by Billy Graham. McCartney's talk contained the usual sports analogies, but these seemed less an intrinsic part of the PK message than a legacy from his former line of work; the Coach (as he was introduced) gives pep talks much as lawyer Finney cross-examined congregations into conversion. Most of the other speakers warned of divine judgment and called for repentance. Hundreds of thousands of men prostrated themselves on the ground and asked forgiveness for abusing women, committing sexual sins, and practicing racial prejudice. Plausible estimates of attendance ranged from 480,000 to 700,000. Although some eyes

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glazed over during the six-hour service, the crowd as a whole was extremely attentive.

Politically conservative motifs were neither dominant nor absent. Speakers asked the assembled to pray for the armed forces, described abortion as the worst abuse of women, and denounced pornography on the internet. The call for contributions was made by Rev. James Robison, a founder of the new Christian right in the late 1970s, who could not resist a swipe at rock and roll. By and large, however, PK leaders shrewdly decided to be on their best behavior. No official memorabilia were sold (though, as usual on the Mall, freelance vendors took up the slack). The calls for racial reconciliation were frequent and heartfelt, and the same theme characterized many of the weekly lessons in the commemorative New Testament. According to a *Washington Post* poll, 14 percent of the attendees were black and 2 percent Asian-American.

As I walked around the Mall and sat on a bench eating my inexpensive PK box lunch, rank-and-file Promise Keepers blessed me as their brother and enthusiastically struck up conversations. Messages on their shirts often signaled membership in both PK and their local churches; others contained Bible citations or such admonitions as "Real men pray every day." Although these acquaintances volunteered no information about the range of give-and-take in their marriages, the *Washington Post* poll suggests that rank-and-file Promise Keepers are less unilateral than their leaders. Ninety percent said that husbands and wives should share equal responsibility for housework, child care, and "big decisions."

ON THE side streets, the Family Research Council offered a free photograph of the assembly to anyone who filled out a coupon. Although this tactic undoubtedly enlarged Gary Bauer's mailing list, the mood of the day was not conducive to blatant political solicitation. Even if it had been, there seemed to be little need for recruitment. The congregation on the Mall consisted overwhelmingly of committed theological conservatives, most of whom were also political conservatives. Indeed, 90 percent of those polled described themselves as born-again, evangelical, or charismatic Christians, and two-thirds had attended one of the sixty-one previous PK assemblies; 60 percent described themselves as politically conservative or very conservative, 26 percent identified with the religious right, and only 15 percent had voted for Bill Clinton.

The *Post* provided the best coverage of a non-"mainline" religious movement that I have ever seen in a major newspaper. Unfortunately, there is little competition for that commendation. No one in the elite media paid much attention to the *religious* beliefs of the men on the Mall, even those beliefs with social ramifications. Did they expect Jesus to return in their lifetimes? Did they think that Protestant and Catholic theological liberals, Mormons, and Moslems were denied salvation? If so, how did this attitude affect their interpersonal relations? In particular, did they share the evident belief of PK leaders, who featured several "Messianic Jews" on the program, that Jews should be converted to Christ?

And so the media analysis was the usual low par for the course. Pundits prone to sarcasm were sarcastic (Maureen Dowd, Christopher Hitchens, and Katha Pollitt). Pundits proud of their studied moderation were studiously moderate (Ellis Cose and E.J. Dionne). Rival spokespersons with a flair for sound bites talked past each other (Patricia Ireland of the National Organization for Women and Steve Chavis of PK on *The Charlie Rose Show*). A few academics tried to provide historical or theological context between the sound bites (Randall Balmer on the PBS *Newshour*).

Apparently no television producer saw fit to invite representatives from Political Research Associates or comparable groups that closely follow Promise Keepers. Rather, they emphasized one side of the story, the search for moral improvement by the rank and file on the Mall, at the expense of the other, the far-right politics of PK leaders. No interviewer pressed McCartney on the potential use of shepherds as partisan recruiters or his wish to convert gays to heterosexuality as well as to Christ. Ted Koppel's questions on *Nightline* were so soft that unsuspecting viewers might have mistaken McCartney for Henry Kissinger.

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Perhaps the brightest spot in the controversy over the assembly on the Mall was the left's response. Intellectually shabby references to incipient fascism and the "paranoid style," which were commonplace in the early 1980s, have virtually disappeared. Even the occasional premonitions of theocracy were well within the range of American political hyperbole. Both Political Research Associates and Equal Partners in Faith specifically warned against criticizing the religious aspects of Promise Keepers or stigmatizing the men assembled on the Mall. Instead, they asked good questions about PK leadership and convinced some of the mainstream print media to consider them.

PK leaders left the Mall with great expectations. PK could dwindle as the fad of male sacred assemblies passes, or it might establish itself as a strong parachurch organization on the cultural right (akin to the Campus Crusade for Christ, which has been active since the 1950s). McCartney himself has less in common with Falwell or Robertson, adept political survivors, than with Anita Bryant, a celebrity who achieved brief notoriety in 1977 with her attack on gay rights and then faded from view.

Whatever happens to Promise Keepers, theologically conservative Protestants are not going to disappear from the United States. They are likely to change, however, and with luck the changes may be for the better. The so-called old-time religion has thrived in the United States partly because it has adapted to the broader culture—even while denying those adaptations. The question of PK patriarchy should be viewed in this light. Evangelicals, fundamentalists, and charismatics are not likely to forsake Sunday services and Scripture for NOW meetings and the collected works of Catharine MacKinnon. Yet Promise Keepers seems to be a sign that they are edging away from inflexible male dominance, much as a previous generation of theological conservatives edged away from anti-Semitism in the 1950s. ●

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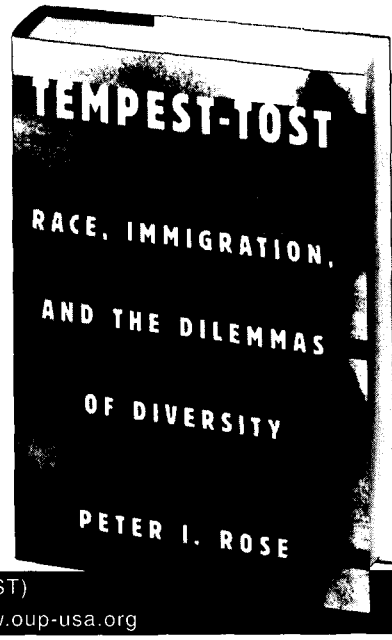

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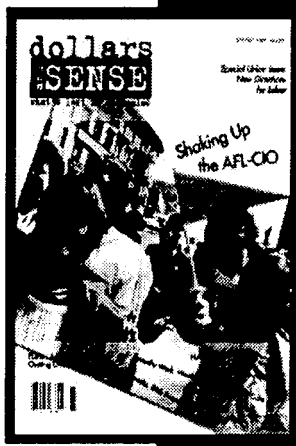

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Hong Kong's Transition to Capitalism

The executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.
-Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*, 1848

Daniel A. Bell

HONG KONG'S "transition" seems to have faded from the international headlines. Contrary to the expectations of doom and gloom, the handover to China, or the "takeover," as the *New York Times* put it on July 1, did not have a devastating impact on the territory's civil and political liberties. Peaceful demonstrations proceed as before, leading democrat Martin Lee has not been thrown into jail or forced into exile, the press has not reined in its criticisms of the executive, and most academics are not particularly concerned about political pressure. The Chinese government, less worried about foreign interference, seems to have relaxed its grip over the territory. The new chief executive, Tung Chee-hwa, is riding high in the polls. The more acute observers detect a slow and subtle erosion of political freedoms in the long term: for example, election rules recently introduced by Hong Kong's provisional legislature will make it more difficult for democrats to be elected in the future, but these complex tinkerings with the political machinery will disappoint those looking for a headline-grabbing story.

Colonial Hong Kong: Myth vs. Reality

There is, however, another, less well-known story to tell about Hong Kong: the impact of the transition on social and economic rights. I would like to report that a ruthless, free-market-oriented economic system has been tempered with a concern for socialist equality. The reality, however, is almost the exact opposite.

Colonial Hong Kong became a global byword for the spirit of free enterprise. Even more than Reagan's America or Thatcher's Britain, the territory was touted as the paradigm case of a laissez-faire economy favored by neoclassical economists. As Milton Friedman put it, "To see how the free market really works, Hong Kong is the place to go." There is some truth to this view. The colonial government firmly opposed the idea that taxpayers' money should be used to subsidize unprofitable firms and sunset industries. There were no tax holidays, tariff incentives, exemptions from licenses or controls, or privileged access to transport facilities designed to lure foreign investors. However, the most widely celebrated feature of Hong Kong's economy—the strikingly low rates of taxation—requires some background explanation. Libertarians abroad look with envy upon Hong Kong's tax rates, but a closer examination of the "Hong Kong system" might temper this enthusiasm.

In 1996, profits of corporations in Hong Kong were taxed at 16.5 percent, and salaries were taxed at a maximum of 15 percent (less than the seemingly implausible flat tax rate of 17 percent proposed by Steve Forbes in the 1996 Republican primary). Moreover, there are many generous personal allowances under Hong Kong tax law, with the effect that 53 percent of the territory's workforce did not pay any income tax. The main explanation for low tax rates, perhaps surprisingly, is not low welfare spending. One important factor is that Hong Kong does not have to support a defense industry (one of the few advantages of being a colony and a "special administrative zone" of sovereign overlords). The most crucial ex-

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planation, however, lies in the fact that less than half of the government's revenue comes from direct taxation.

The Hong Kong government actually derives much of its revenue from land transactions. The territory's land is technically owned by the government, and the government fills its coffers by selling fifty-year leases to developers (the fact that there are no absolute private property rights to land will come as another surprise to boosters of "Hong Kong-style" libertarianism). In the recent Hong Kong budget, income from land sources was $7.7 billion.* This was an increase of 63.8 percent over earlier estimates, and it occurred because the government sold more land to take advantage of a buoyant property market. The government, in other words, has an interest in maintaining high property values—currently the highest in the world—if it is to maintain its policy of low taxation. It does this by carefully controlling the amount of land that is released for sale: if land were to be released too quickly, property values would be reduced, and the government's revenue would be affected. It is, of course, those buying new homes and renting from the private sector who pay the price for this policy. Many Hong Kongers live in third world conditions, and the need to pay astronomical residential property prices is widely viewed as an indirect form of taxation.

MOST GOVERNMENT land is sold to three real-estate developers: Henderson Land, Sun Hung Kai Properties, and Cheung Kong. These developers sit on huge tracts of land, drip-feeding apartments onto the market so as to maintain high property prices. In 1996, the big three developers sold 6.7 million units, fewer than in 1992. During that period, prices increased fourfold and profits doubled. The heads of two of the property firms can now be found on the list of the world's ten richest men. Meanwhile, potential new entrants to the market are restricted by the huge cost of paying land-conversion premiums that are the bedrock of government revenues. Critics of this cozy arrangement between the government and major developers argue that the system could be overhauled by such means as forcing developers to pay profits tax rather than an up-front premium to the government, but this legacy of colonial rule looks set to remain in the foreseeable future.

Perhaps none of this should come as a surprise. As the distinguished American sociologist Daniel Bell (no relation) put it, "I always assume—this is the latent Marxism in me—that when sizable fortunes are built in small city-states, it is because of an interlocking arrangement between the oligarchies and the government." Still, one cannot help but notice the large gap between this reality and the myth of an open and competitive market where only talent and luck determine the economic winners.

Having said this, there is another, perhaps more desirable, sense in which colonial Hong Kong deviated from the myth of a laissez-faire economy with the government limiting itself to the role of the "night watchman." In the last six years of the colonial government, welfare spending increased at a real rate of at least 10 percent annually, leading many businesspeople to worry that Hong Kong was heading for welfare statehood. The fact of the matter, however, is that Hong Kong already is a welfare state: in 1995–1996, Hong Kong's government spent 47 percent of its public expenditure on social services, more than Singapore and Taiwan and only slightly less than the United Kingdom.

Hong Kong's social welfare system was launched by Lord Murray MacLehose, the first diplomat with a socialist background sent to the colony. One year after assuming the governorship in 1972, Lord MacLehose announced that public housing, education, medical, and social welfare services would be treated as the four pillars of a fair and caring society. Most distinctively, Lord MacLehose launched a public housing program that was meant to house the three hundred thousand people still living in squatter huts or temporary housing. Today, the Housing Authority is the largest landlord in the world. More than three million Hong Kongers, or 52 percent of the population, live in subsidized housing, most of whom rent flats from the Housing Authority with rents set at one-fifth the mar-

*All dollar figures are U.S. dollars.

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ket level (the rest have bought subsidized flats under various home-ownership schemes, with prices discounted 50 percent from those in the private sector). It is worth noting that public housing is a highly valued commodity in Hong Kong; there are long queues for that public good.

BEYOND PUBLIC housing, Hong Kong also has most of the standard features of welfare states in Western Europe. There is an excellent public health care system: private hospitals are actually going out of business because clean and efficient public hospitals are well subsidized (the government pays 97 percent of the costs) and indiscriminately accept patients at minimal charges (there is a $7 daily user fee, irrespective of the real costs of treatment, and patients can also get heavily subsidized prescriptions, unlike, say, Canada's health care system, where patients must pay market fees for medicine once they leave the hospital). Hong Kong has an affordable public transport system that covers nearly every nook and cranny of the territory (the buses and subways are technically privately owned, but the government has substantial equity in most transport companies and it has the power to make or break companies by granting franchises and monopolized routes). The large majority of primary and secondary schools are either free or heavily subsidized, and the territory's eight tertiary institutions all receive most of their funds from the public coffers. The government provides flat-rate allowances for vulnerable groups, such as the elderly and the disabled, and means-tested aid is provided to raise the income of individuals and families to a level at which basic and "special" needs (including spectacles and dentures) are met. It is also worth noting that Hong Kong provides some welfare aid "with Chinese characteristics": in accordance with the traditional Confucian norm of filial piety, taxpayers get allowances for taking care of elderly parents at home. Hong Kong does not have unemployment insurance, but with unemployment rates that rarely rise above 3 percent, this may be less of an issue than in Western Europe.

The reader may be left wondering how Hong Kong can afford such an extensive social welfare program, given the low rate of taxation. A large chunk of the government's revenue, to repeat, comes from land transactions, but 6 percent of the revenue comes from "betting duty." The latter income is derived mainly from the proceeds of the popular Mark Six lotteries and the Hong Kong Jockey Club, and this money is used to finance welfare services through grants and loans. This explains the rather curious phenomenon that many hospital wards in Hong Kong are decorated with plaques from the Hong Kong Jockey Club.

The Transition to Capitalism

In a strange paradox of history, the nominally socialist Chinese government consistently opposed the introduction of further social welfare programs in Hong Kong. During the colonial era, some analysts explained this by pointing to Chinese suspicions of British intentions: new welfare initiatives by the Hong Kong government were perceived as part of a British plot to denude the Hong Kong treasury of money and to leave the region in disarray with mounting debts. But this explanation does not cover everything: the new Hong Kong government has been left with huge cash hoards (more than $46 billion in fiscal reserves, with a projected surplus of $7.8 billion this year), and still the Chinese government has been signaling its opposition to further welfare spending. Other analysts allude to the fact that much of the impetus for recent increases in welfare spending came from prodemocracy parties in the legislature who were opposed to Chinese rule. The problem with this view, however, is that the "pro-China" Democratic Alliance for the Betterment of Hong Kong has also made demands for higher spending on welfare. The main explanation for the Chinese Communist Party's antiwelfarism is rather that it has chosen to enter into a strategic alliance with Hong Kong's business class.

The origins of this alliance can be traced to the early 1980s, when China first prepared for the Hong Kong handover. At that time, Chinese officials felt uncertain whether locals would support reversion. Xu Jiatun, then serving as Beijing's top man in Hong Kong explained in his memoirs that "a general fear . . . [of] the end of the world prevailed. Everyone

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wanted to flee with their money." (Xu himself defected to the United States in 1990.) In response, China adopted the strategy of pumping investment into the territory and of aligning itself with local capitalists, which was seen as necessary to maintain the economic viability of Hong Kong. To earn the support of corporate bosses, the Chinese government organized timely interventions on behalf of Hong Kong companies. In one notorious example, the Bank of China helped to save the Tung Shipping Group and its public arm, Orient Overseas, from collapse. The president of Tung Shipping was Tung Chee-hwa, who is now the chief executive of the Hong Kong government. China also reached out to many one-time enemies when forming advisory bodies to lay down policies for post-British Hong Kong. Members of the powerful Preparatory Committee, for example, included nearly all of Hong Kong's twenty richest people. Local capitalists, for their part, have returned the favors: the property tycoon Li Ka-shing built a $130 million glass high-rise in central Hong Kong, which was offered as a gift to the Chinese Foreign Ministry.

THE IMPACT of this alliance could already be felt in the budget passed just before the handover, a budget prepared with the participation of the Chinese government. Beijing had strongly criticized the 14.7 percent increase in spending on social welfare in 1996–1997, and the new budget cut the increase to 9.4 percent. The Hong Kong Chamber of Commerce welcomed the budget as providing a "sound fiscal and economic background" for the return to Chinese rule, but the budget was condemned by grassroots activists who expected that, given the huge surplus, the government would provide more aid to the needy. Huang Chen-ya, a spokesman for the Democratic Party, called the budget "extremely miserly to the elderly and the disabled." The slower growth of welfare spending, he said, shows that "the Hong Kong government has knuckled under to pressure from the Chinese government." Especially galling to the critics were the give-aways to the rich, such as the slashing of the duty on wine from 90 percent to 60 percent. Notwithstanding this heated debate in the legislature, the budget was passed with a slim majority.

Since the handover, however, Tung Chee-hwa's government has less to fear from the political left. It was widely reported abroad that the British government's last-minute decision to push for faster democratization in Hong Kong by increasing the number of directly elected seats in the legislature came to an ill-fated end. The Chinese government, mistrustful of British intentions and incensed by Governor Chris Patten's refusal of its request for private consultation before he went public, replaced the last legislature under British rule with a "provisional legislature" composed of handpicked "pro-China" forces. More significant for the long term, the provisional legislature has recently introduced election rules for the new legislature in 1998. Of the sixty seats in the new legislature, twenty will be chosen by the citizens in the constituency where they live. A complex form of proportional representation will be employed to elect representatives for these seats. This will likely penalize the Democratic Party, which won sixteen of the twenty geographical seats under the first-past-the-post system employed in 1995. Not coincidentally, the Democrats attract most of their support from the poor and the working class, and they tend to favor more spending for social programs. Thirty members of Parliament, or half the number of seats, in the new legislature will come from functional constituencies formed from professions and trades, and ten seats are to be chosen by an eight-hundred-person committee, which includes ex-officio members from the National People's Congress in Beijing. The concept of functional constituencies is a legacy of British rule, but Patten, Hong Kong's last governor, broadened the groupings of most constituencies to include ordinary employees, many of whom voted for the Democrats. The new functional constituencies will revert back to the old system of corporate voting where the franchise is narrowed down to maximize the clout of the business elite, with the number of voters (mainly wage laborers) slashed by 2.5 million. The editors of the *Asian Wall Street Journal*, which is not known for its socialist tendencies, commented that "the arrangement is a means

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of reducing public participation in the political process while stacking the next legislature with people who depend on favors from the regime in Hong Kong or Beijing and answer to narrow special interests, particularly the business elite."

In terms of the actual exercise of power, however, it is worth pointing out that the legislature was never meant to play a significant role. Hong Kong has always been, and will continue to be (according to the Basic Law, Hong Kong's mini-constitution), an executive-led government. Even in its most "democratic" moments—that is, following the introduction of direct elections in 1991—the legislature rarely initiated legislation; it operated primarily as a forum for criticizing and refining legislation proposed by the executive. More commonly, the legislature was a rubber stamp, and it looks set to resume this "traditional" role in the future (moreover, written consent will have to be given by the chief executive before bills relating to government policies can be introduced in the new legislature). So the real power shift in Hong Kong arises from changes in the composition of the executive branch.

In 1973, following a report by management consultants McKinsey and Co., the Hong Kong government delegated much power to top civil servants known as policy secretaries. Under this system, policy secretaries devised policies, persuaded the administration to support them, and then lobbied the legislature to adopt them—all functions that are carried out by ministers in most democratic countries. Whatever the flaws of this arrangement, few doubt that policy secretaries—meritocratically selected according to rigorous criteria of excellence—carried out their tasks with integrity, in ways that looked beyond their own personal interests. Hong Kong's welfare state was developed under this system, which operated for nearly a quarter of a century. Moreover, the system has been popular within the community: Anson Chan, the chief secretary, is consistently chosen in public opinion surveys as the territory's most well-liked public figure (she is more popular than democrats such as Martin Lee and Emily Lau, not to mention the "pro-China" forces).

The new administration, however, looks set to radically transform this system. All incumbent secretaries, including Anson Chan, have been reappointed to their posts, but it appears that their "ministerial" functions will be taken over by eleven Beijing-appointed executive council (Exco) members. At the apex of this new structure stands shipping tycoon Tung Chee-hwa, the chief executive. Tung has appointed several Exco members to head policy task forces, which is a new practice, and already tension seems to be growing between the civil servants and Exco members. Anson Chan herself publicly complained that Tung does not understand the intricacies of government. Grassroots critics, however, worry more about the class makeup of Exco members: nearly all are successful businessmen. They were recently forced to declare their financial interests, and several hold directorships in some of Hong Kong's biggest companies. One of them, Leung Chun-ying, a wealthy owner of a property surveying firm, will be in charge of housing policy.

The emerging political elite also includes tycoons who exercise power while staying in the background. The most powerful is Tung Chee-hwa's "special adviser," Paul Yip Kwok-wah. Yip, who has been doing business with China since the late 1970s, made a fortune in Hong Kong and the mainland for his privately held company, Renful Group, which has interests in real estate development and manufacturing. He heads the Hong Kong Policy Research Institute, which has recently tried to collect information on human rights groups in the region. The Tung Chee-hwa administration has also appointed a senior special assistant, Andrew Lo Cheung-on, who worked for Tung at his family shipping firm, Orient Overseas. Lo's salary, to be paid by taxpayers, will be $236,000 per year. His duties include maintaining a "regular liaison with the Chief Executive's constituencies and the Central People's Government" in Beijing.

NOT SURPRISINGLY, it did not take long for the new administration to make explicit its pro-business orientation. One of the last acts of the outgoing legislature was to pass five laws significantly boosting workers' rights in Hong Kong. These laws, includ-

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ing one that gives unions the right to use collective bargaining to negotiate workers' salaries and fringe benefits, and another that protects workers against unfair dismissal for taking part in union activities, were immediately condemned as "dangerous" by the chairman of the Federation of Hong Kong Industries, Henry Tang Ying-yen. Tang, who was appointed to Tung Chee-hwa's executive council, claimed that the laws would hurt competitiveness. A leading economist denied this and a constitutional lawyer pointed out that Hong Kong's Basic Law states that the International Labor Convention (which includes the right to collective bargaining) shall apply in the territory—but to no avail. Following the handover, the Beijing-appointed Provisional Legislature voted to suspend these laws, with the exception of two relatively trivial ones that increased compensation for victims of occupational deafness and made May 1 into a legal holiday. Tung explained that the suspended laws would have disrupted the "harmonious relations" that existed between employers and employees. But from the perspective of a prominent unionist, "it just shows that the government is controlled by business tycoons."

The government's new orientation is also being felt in Hong Kong's tertiary institutions. There is a drive to make the universities more "efficient," which involves importing techniques from the realm of business studies. The chairman of a commission on university funding, Chase Manhattan managing director Antony Leung Kam-chung (who has also been appointed to Tung Chee-hwa's Executive Council and put in charge of education policy), has announced plans to cut funding for higher education by 10 percent over the next three years, with the likelihood of a further 10 percent cut after that. This follows a period of rapid growth of higher education in Hong Kong that gave unprecedented opportunities of upward mobility to Hong Kongers from underprivileged backgrounds: the percentage of the seventeen-to-twenty-year-old age group that could receive tertiary education in Hong Kong increased from 5 percent to 18 percent in less than ten years. Under the new regime, however, student fees are increasing, and all new appointees at the University of Hong Kong are hired on three-year, non–tenure-track contracts (the implications for academic freedom do not have to be spelled out). What is interesting is that these cutbacks are being implemented in a context in which the government is flush with money, unlike similar cuts elsewhere, where austerity in higher education is driven primarily by the need to close budget deficits.

The Hong Kong branch of Friends of the Earth, meanwhile, has attacked the new government's approach to the environment. The outgoing government had boosted spending on the environment by 60 percent in recent years, but there are signs that the new chief executive, Tung Chee-hwa, plans to shift strategies: one of his first policy statements indicated that the second stage of a much-needed sewage treatment system would be delayed because his priority was to encourage industrial development. Tung has also proposed to freeze legislation that seeks to protect Hong Kong's shrinking Victoria Harbor from developers and land reclamation. The government plans to double the size of the city's port, already the world's second largest, over the next ten years, which is expected, according to its own forecast, to double the number of fume-belching trucks and contribute to a 50 percent drop in air quality by 2011 (Hong Kong already has a serious air pollution problem, caused primarily by the widespread use of a highly toxic form of diesel fuel that is banned in most developed cities).

In short, the most tangible change in Hong Kong's "way of life" since the handover—at least from the perspective of the "worst off"—has been the steady erosion of social and economic rights. In the words of a representative of a coalition of seven grassroots organizations (including union and religious bodies), the government has "formulated a series of policies to benefit and protect the interests of business since the handover. . . . These policies would only widen the poverty gap and create an unhealthy atmosphere in society."

To be fair, Tung has announced some measures to deal with areas of social welfare that were neglected by the Patten administration. Most noteworthy, Tung has promised to increase Social Security payments to the elderly

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by $47 a month. A representative of the Elderly Rights League, however, said that her group was "very disappointed" with this measure, arguing that the increased assistance was far lower than the $362 recommended in a survey commissioned by the legislative council in 1994. Even the chairman of the pro-business Liberal Party said the government could have well afforded to give a higher increase in Social Security payments, but had failed to do so.

In any case, it is difficult to be too optimistic for the long term. Housing prices have gone up by 30 percent since the beginning of this year, and Tung has responded by proposing a home starter loan of $75,000 for young professionals and middle-income families. Critics warned that this scheme does nothing for the poor and could spark a fresh wave of property speculation. Moreover, Tung's executive councillors seem more inclined to deal with budget surpluses by cutting taxes than by increasing welfare spending: two Exco members have spoken out publicly in favor of cutting the corporate profits tax to 15 percent. Tang added that the tax net should be widened, since "there are hardly any people who would mind paying a few hundred dollars or a thousand-odd dollars on taxes." Ousted legislator and unionist Lee Cheuk-yan replied that "it is adding fuel to the fire to require more people from the lower and middle classes to pay tax when they are already under pressure to make ends meet." Nonetheless, the *South China Morning Post* predicted that next March's budget will include a reduction in the corporate profits tax.

Silver Linings?

To the surprise of many, the handover to China has not had a negative impact on Hong Kong's economy. Notwithstanding recent turbulence on the stock market, the "fundamentals," as mainstream economists say, remain sound. Foreign critics tend to worry most about heavy-handed economic interference by Chinese "red capitalists," but the most immediate effect of the change of sovereignty has been to end the political patronage that was so conspicuous during colonial rule. The British corporation Cable and Wireless held the local telephone monopoly until 1995, and the government is currently negotiating to end its international call-monopoly franchise. Cathay Pacific, a predominantly British corporation, holds all landing rights at the Hong Kong airport, but a number of relatively new local and Chinese airlines have indicated that Cathay's monopoly will have to end soon. The traditional dominance of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation, which held seats on the executive council, is being challenged by the Bank of China. British workers are no longer given the automatic right to work in Hong Kong. The distortions of colonial rule also influenced the workings of Hong Kong's universities, and there has been progress on this front as well: expatriate lecturers were given housing benefits that amounted to $6,000 a month, but this kind of discrimination has been abolished for new appointees. Of course, what seems like the opening up of markets and social institutions with fair participation for all may simply mask the appearance of a new Chinese elite. But it is worth pointing out that Chinese economic interests in Hong Kong are not monolithic. As Yi-zheng Lian, the editor-in-chief of the *Hong Kong Economic Journal* (Hong Kong's premier business daily in Chinese), points out, various Chinese concerns are jockeying for position and influence in Hong Kong, and this relatively open competition may steer economic development in a healthy direction. In any case, the Hong Kong economy looks set to prosper so long as it continues to operate as the gateway for investment in mainland China.

But it remains to be seen if Hong Kong's poor will benefit from these developments. According to a recent study carried out by the Hong Kong Social Security Society, one in seven Hong Kongers survives on less than $11 a day. Moreover, its research showed that 13 percent lived below the poverty line in 1991, compared to 8 percent in 1971—notwithstanding the development of Hong Kong's welfare state since the early 1970s. The increasing poverty rate is partly explained by social factors—the rising proportion of elderly people and single-parent families—but recent economic integration with China has also played a role. By the end of 1996, the cumulative value of Hong Kong's realized direct invest-

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ment in China reached $100 billion. Most noteworthy, Hong Kong's manufacturing sector has been almost entirely transferred to the southern province of Guangdong (where labor is cheaper and workers' rights are practically nonexistent), with the consequence that Hong Kong's industrial workers now find it much harder to find decent jobs in Hong Kong. Most end up working in low-paying service jobs without much hope of upward mobility, and the unlucky ones are permanently unemployed.

The flip side of this story is that Guangdong is now China's richest province. Hong Kong companies employ nearly six million workers in the province, which is more than ten times the size of Hong Kong's own manufacturing force. In other words, the number of people who have been lifted out of poverty as a consequence of economic integration with China is greater than the number who have lost out. So for those who care only about impartial justice—as opposed to those who experience their lives as bound up with the good of the Hong Kong community—this might be seen as a piece of good news. ●

POSTSCRIPT: In two weeks of hectic trading last October, the Hang Seng index (Hong Kong's stock market index) dropped by more than 25 percent. Compared to the record high of August, the Hang Seng was down by nearly 40 percent. Why did this happen? According to Senator Alfonse D'Amato (R-NY), chairman of the Senate Banking Committee, the dramatic fall of the Hong Kong market was a "lesson for all freedom-loving people around the world" of the dangers "now that the Communist Chinese have taken over."

However, the Chinese communists are to blame only in the sense that well-connected mainland Chinese firms had contributed to a dangerously overheated market. In fact, things could have been even worse without intervention from the Chinese government: interest rates were cut on the mainland so as to stimulate domestic demand and support the Hong Kong dollar, which was only the second time in history that one of the world's great economic powers altered its macroeconomic policy with the aim of supporting a minor currency (the other example is the U.S. Federal Reserve Bank's decision to cut interest rates on August 5, 1927, so that the British chancellor of the exchequer, Winston Churchill, could avoid the political ignominy of devaluing the pound against the U.S. currency after he took Britain back on to the gold standard at a cripplingly high rate). The Chinese government is concerned because it may have to postpone its privatization plans for money-losing state-owned enterprises, which was a central plank of the last Communist Party congress. Privatization requires billions of dollars of capital, and much of that was supposed to come from Hong Kong's buoyant stock market.

So why did Hong Kong's stock market crash? The main culprit is the regional currency crisis in Southeast Asia. Goods produced by Hong Kong's competitors began to look relatively cheap, especially after Taiwan finally caved in to devaluation pressures. Perceiving this weakness, currency speculators attacked the Hong Kong dollar. The Hong Kong government, however, could not afford to devalue the dollar: the local currency had been pegged to the U.S. dollar for the last fourteen years, and the peg provided an important source of stability, especially in these uncertain times. Removing the pegged exchange rate would have undermined the credibility of the Hong Kong government (after multiple assurances that the peg was "sacred") and could have led to massive capital flight. The government, however, had to pay a severe price for defending the currency. It spent billions of dollars of Hong Kong's reserves battling the speculators, and it raised interest rates to sky-high levels to protect the dollar. High interest rates hurt Hong Kong's property sector, and since seven out of ten listed companies invest in property, the stock market took a nosedive.

The most obvious losers were the three big property magnates, who each lost roughly two billion dollars in two separate days of trading (though nearly half of this amount was recovered on October 29, when the stock market jumped by 18.8 percent). Assuming that the government maintains the peg, the future does not look bright for the property sector. As the *South China Morning Post* notes, however,

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"this is hardly a cause for concern. Hong Kong enjoyed the party but must face the fact that generating sustainable increases in wealth involves more than flipping cheap high rises every few years." The more serious worry is that the stock market crash will usher in a recession. With less money to spend, Hong Kong's consumers might stay at home and the service sector will suffer. What's left of the manufacturing sector will be decimated by competitive pressures. This would lead to rising unemployment and more hardship. The government, afraid of depleting its reserves (to be fair, the argument that it needs massive reserves to fend off currency speculators no longer seems so implausible) will be even more reluctant to increase welfare spending. So we can predict more social unrest. At that point, the question will not only be whether the new administration will fail in its commitment to respect social and economic rights. The government may face pressure to crack down on "trouble-makers" for the sake of social stability, and its commitment to civil and political rights in Hong Kong will also be put to the test.

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Douglas W. Payne

Mexican Labor: Cracks in the Monolith

FIDEL VELÁSQUEZ, the ninety-seven-year-old Mexican labor baron, finally expired on a Saturday morning last June. Those Mexicans who owed him the most were in full attendance at his wake: the free-market, ruling-party elite led by the government finance minister, and Velásquez's fossilized, millionaire lieutenants in the Mexican Confederation of Workers (CTM). The CTM, which Velásquez commanded for nearly six decades, claims a membership of five million in more than twelve thousand affiliated unions. But limousines seemed to outnumber workers that day at the seven-story, bunker-like CTM headquarters. Velásquez, who almost single-handedly transformed Mexican workers into an arm of the ruling party, was to the end a servant of the state.

Most of the few hundred blue-collars who showed came from a Chrysler plant, whose managers enticed them with gifts of new uniforms and a free bus ride to the city. They were told to return for the funeral on Sunday, but not many were on hand when President Ernesto Zedillo extolled Velásquez for his role in maintaining social and economic stability. Indeed, by keeping organized labor enchained, Velásquez had done more than any single individual to avert a social explosion during the peso devaluations, privatizations, and International Monetary Fund-prescribed austerity of the last fifteen years. To the delight of multinational enterprises, Mexican workers are now among the poorest, lowest-paid in Latin America. That Ford, Sony, Daewoo, General Motors, General Electric, and others did not send emissaries to honor Velásquez's legacy was an act of utmost ingratitude.

The day of the funeral, a cartoon in *La Jornada* newspaper depicted a row of CTM leaders, slouched in wheelchairs and covered with cobwebs, wondering what to do with Velásquez's now-empty wheelchair. The next day the CTM announced that one of them, Leonardo Rodríguez Alcaine, a relative youngster at seventy-eight, would be the interim chief until the next CTM congress in March 1998. When asked by reporters why so few workers came to pay their last respects to the man known as "Don Fidel," Rodríguez growled, "Because it was a weekend."

In mid-July Zedillo and Rodríguez pledged to maintain the "historic alliance" between the CTM and the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). That was taken as good news by Mexico's economic elite and foreign investors. But neither the CTM nor the PRI is capable of keeping their end of the bargain as they used to.

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Only days before, substantial numbers of the CTM's rank and file had disobeyed orders by voting for Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, the left-wing opposition candidate who won the election for mayor of Mexico City. In the rest of the country, worker votes contributed to the PRI's unprecedented loss of its majority in the Mexican Congress. Then, in August, unions representing up to 1.5 million workers broke from the CTM's grip to found an independent labor confederation. That concerned emerging-market honchos on Wall Street, but heartened U.S. unions, which have come up against a CTM wall in their efforts at cross-border cooperation against multinational corporations. Still, while the end of state unionism can now at least be contemplated, the guts of the state-party system remain intact, and the next stage looks to be a drawn-out, uncertain, and ugly affair.

VELÁSQUEZ HELPED deliver organized labor to the PRI in 1935, laying the groundwork for the entire corporatist structure. As the undisputed boss of the CTM since 1941, Velásquez endorsed every Mexican president, put the CTM machine behind every PRI candidate, required every CTM member to join the PRI, and used CTM goon squads to steamroll any attempt at independent organizing, often relying on government might for backup. Velásquez supported the PRI when it sent the army to crush a wildcat railroad workers strike in 1959, and again in 1968 when soldiers massacred hundreds of students demonstrating in Mexico City against authoritarian rule.

In exchange for such loyalty, the PRI heaped economic subsidies and lucrative government posts on CTM bosses and provided wages and benefits that made CTM members the elite of the Mexican workforce.

The alliance worked well enough until 1982, when the PRI finally mismanaged oil-rich Mexico into bankruptcy and a new generation of PRI Ivy Leaguers led by President Carlos Salinas decided to refloat the PRI dynasty with foreign capital. That meant adhering to the IMF playbook and betting the store on the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Velásquez grumbled, but in the end agreed to policies that would make Mexican workers pay dearly.

Between 1982 and 1994 Mexican workers' real earning power shrank by a staggering 70 percent to 75 percent. Each year from 1988 to 1994, Velásquez signed off on the so-called *pactos*, agreements orchestrated by Salinas among government, business, and labor to keep wages low, cut public spending, and otherwise abide by the demands of international financial markets and foreign investors. Meanwhile, the number of *Forbes*-certified Mexican billionaires jumped from three to twenty-four, multinational corporations cashed in on Mexican labor now cheap enough to compete with Asian sweatshops, and Carlos Salinas was rewarded with a seat on the board of Dow Jones at the end of his term.

When President Zedillo took office in December 1994, the Mexican peso collapsed, after having been recklessly propped up by Salinas to ensure Zedillo's election. Whatever money was left in the pockets of Mexican workers lost nearly half its value overnight, Mexican businesses sank amid massive debt, unemployment soared, and foreign capital flew off to other markets. To lure back investors meant renewing the *pacto*. As he had so many times before, Velásquez snarled threats about strikes and withdrawing labor from the agreement. Then, during one of his regular Monday press conferences, ashes spilling down his shirtfront from the cigar crooked in the corner of his mouth, he mumbled his assent. By the end of 1995 the cost of basic subsistence for a typical family was beyond the reach of three-quarters of Mexican workers.

Still, Mexico did not blow. The Zapatista guerrillas initially spooked the government but were now bottled up by the Mexican army far to the south in Chiapas. "They should be exterminated," Don Fidel had said. The PRI was more concerned about the pent-up anger in worker ranks, so much so that in 1995 Velásquez canceled the official May Day labor parade. That unprecedented act spared Zedillo, who normally would have presided from the balcony of the National Palace, from a frontal blast of labor discontent.

Velásquez ordered unions to stay home again in May 1996, and was horrified when

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two hundred thousand rebel workers staged their own parade. Most belonged to the newly founded Forum of Unionism Facing the Nation, a diverse group of about two dozen unions led by the telephone workers. The "Foro," as it's commonly known, demanded freedom for labor from government control, the dismantling of patronage ties that bind union bosses to the PRI, and new labor laws.

The Mexican Constitution, fruit of the 1910-1917 Revolution, establishes in Article 123 the right to freely organize unions and to strike. It also provides for equal pay for equal work, a federally mandated minimum wage, and maternity leave. But the corporatist relationship between the PRI and organized labor left Article 123 suspended on the winds of unchecked power and corruption.

The law that counts is the labor code. It stipulates that all union elections and strikes must be authorized by the government. Unions formed outside the CTM therefore find it virtually impossible to obtain official recognition and strikes are routinely declared "nonexistent." Workers who step out of line are fired; those who keep at it are subject to attacks by thugs in the pay of local CTM chieftains, who generally are in league with management. When the CTM needs reinforcements, the government will use the police and the army to deal with labor indiscipline.

During the 1996 May Day spectacle, Velásquez threatened to expel Foro unions from the Workers' Congress (CT), the CTM-dominated umbrella organization created by the PRI in 1967. But Velásquez did not follow through, apparently fearing the Foro would establish a rival coalition. Which is just what happened after he died.

At an assembly last August, seventeen Foro unions announced that they were forming the National Union of Workers (UNT). Nine others, however, stayed away, including the million-plus teachers union, whose leaders opted to remain within the CT. The UNT is a mixed bag. It includes former CT members as well as more militant unions that have always fought from the outside against the PRI's labor monopoly. Differences were put aside to unite behind the principles of labor democracy and independence. Within a few weeks, dozens of other unions and peasant organizations had signed up and UNT leaders claimed a membership of 1.5 million.

The UNT represents the first major fissure in Mexican state unionism. Two key questions are whether the UNT can hold together, and whether it can capitalize on the PRI's loss of its majority in the Congress to achieve reform of the labor code.

Although the UNT seemed set on establishing a collective leadership, the attention of many has been focused on Francisco Hernández Juárez, the forty-eight-year-old head of the telephone workers. Charismatic and smart, he had been the prime mover and principal voice of the Foro since its first days. But the more militant unions of the UNT are wary of him because of his checkered past. Hernández was a favorite of former president Salinas, who took him along on tours of the United States, and he has been portrayed in *El Financiero*, Mexico's foremost independent business daily, as an example of "new corporatism."

Hernández raised eyebrows last September when he invited President Zedillo to the telephone workers' national convention. By reaching out to Zedillo, Hernández risked alienating the many UNT unions that had backed Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas and his Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) in the elections just a few months before. The PRD was committed to ending state unionism and Cárdenas had promised full labor autonomy under his municipal administration in Mexico City. Moreover, the PRD was now in an alliance with the three other opposition parties in the Congress—the center-right National Action Party (PAN), the PRI's other principal opponent, and two small parties, the Green Ecological Party (PVEM) and the Workers Party (PT). Together, they held a narrow majority and were aiming to undo the legal underpinnings of the corporatist state, including the labor code.

Long-standing antagonisms between the PRD and the PAN could easily cause that alliance to unravel. Still, many UNT unions felt the confederation's political focus should be on Congress, not on flirting with Zedillo. Yes,

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Zedillo had allowed the electoral reforms that led to unprecedented losses for the PRI. But there was little reason to believe he would not continue to play rough to satisfy foreign capital's appetite for cheap, docile labor.

Mexico has become increasingly militarized under Zedillo. Active or retired officers now command police forces in Mexico City and twenty-one of Mexico's thirty-one states. The military budget has nearly doubled, even as social spending has been slashed. The stated purpose is to combat drug traffickers and the surge in violent, poverty-driven crime. But that is often used as a cover for targeting government opponents, including independent unionists.

Human rights violations in Mexico, including torture and disappearances, have soared under Zedillo. His apparent contempt for reform was on display last September, when he and other government officials snubbed Pierre Sané, the head of Amnesty International, during his visit to Mexico. Mexico and Cuba are now the only two countries in Latin America where human rights groups do not enjoy freedom of movement and access to top officials.

In early October, the UNT said that a number of CTM unions were preparing to join the UNT. The UNT had come out against the *pactos* and, with the expectation that the CTM leadership would continue to support these wage-suppressing agreements, it hoped that more CTM unions would defect. But as everyone jockeyed for position and leverage in a highly fluid political environment—from the UNT and the CTM, to Zedillo, the PRI and the opposition parties in Congress—another equally crucial battle for labor freedom continued in the trenches.

SINCE THE early 1990s, a number of independent unions, some of which are now in the UNT, have been risking life and limb by trying to organize workers in foreign-owned plants and striking for better wages in the public sector. There are two principal fronts: the burgeoning *maquiladora* sector, the centerpiece of the Zedillo government's low-wage, export strategy, and central and southern Mexico, where dissident teachers have rebelled against cuts in the education budget. In both arenas, the majority of workers are women.

Among the independents spearheading the effort in the *maquiladora* industry is the Authentic Workers' Front (FAT). The FAT, one of the more militant groups in the UNT, is a federation of unions, worker-owned cooperatives, and farmworker and community organizations. Although its combined membership probably does not exceed fifty thousand, FAT represents manufacturing workers in at least half of Mexico's thirty-one states and has been willing to engage head-on the combined strength of state unionism and multinational corporations operating in Mexico.

The FAT also has been a pioneer in cross-border cooperation with U.S. unions, civic organizations, and their Canadian counterparts. In the early 1990s it formed an alliance with the independent United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE). Together, they have established a worker education center in Juárez, Mexico, and coordinated organizing efforts in *maquiladoras*. They also put out a biweekly newsletter, *Mexican Labor News and Analysis*, which can be found on the UE web site and provides an indispensable window into the uphill struggle of independent labor organizing in Mexico.

There are now close to one million *maquiladora* workers, most of them women, toiling in more than three thousand factories. The assembly-for-export sector has nearly doubled in size since 1994 as multinational corporations have swarmed in to exploit wages that have tumbled to seventy-five cents an hour and safety rules that exist mostly on paper. *Maquiladoras* currently account for more than 40 percent of Mexican exports. They are among the country's top three foreign exchange earners and the only sector of the Mexican economy that is actually growing. While a majority of them are still found along the border with the U.S., the Zedillo government is promoting their expansion throughout Mexico. As of last September it could brag to foreign investors that not one *maquiladora* had been successfully organized by a truly independent union.

In October, the FAT was hoping for a breakthrough at the Han Young factory in

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Tijuana, which produces tractor-trailer parts for the Korean giant Hyundai. Han Young workers were rebelling against the imposition of a "ghost union," a common ploy in which a CT or CTM affiliate is hired by a company to "represent" workers, but shows up only to get paid or to intimidate workers when they try to organize independently.

Ghost unions are a variation of the "protection contract," a widespread practice in which companies arriving in Mexico sign low-wage contracts with PRI-allied unions, usually kicking back to the union bosses as part of the bargain. The contracts are already in place when workers are hired, so affiliation with another union such as the FAT means no job. Last September, FAT-supported workers at a Mexico City auto-parts factory owned by the Connecticut-based Echlin company tried to contest a CTM protection contract. As reported by the newsletter *Working Together: Labor Report on the Americas*, more than fifty were fired. The day of the union representation election, workers had to vote out loud in the presence of two hundred CTM-hired thugs wielding pipes, sticks, and guns. Most voted for the CTM.

When Han Young workers formed their union last summer, the company countered with firings, physical intimidation, and bribery attempts. Still, the union continued to demand recognition, supported by the FAT and a campaign by the San Diego-based Committee for Maquiladora Workers, which organized solidarity missions to Tijuana and demonstrations outside Hyundai's San Diego office. In September, the company finally conceded to a union election.*

But even if an independent union were to gain formal recognition at Han Young, there is no guarantee it would be able to operate as such. Just before the vote, Han Young management said that if the FAT affiliate won, the plant would be shut down, a common management tactic in the *maquiladora* zone.

In another case, last April, the Mexican telephone workers and the Communications Workers of America (CWA) won an apparent victory at the Sonora plant of Maxi-Switch, Inc., a Taiwanese-owned company that manufactures electronic games such as Nintendo's Game Boy. Maxi-Switch workers had organized an independent union and were up against the usual collusion of the government, the company, and the CTM.

The CWA and the Mexican telephone workers, which established links in 1995, filed a complaint on the Maxi-Switch workers' behalf through mechanisms set up under the NAFTA side agreement on labor. The agreement offers little toward the enforcement of workers' rights, but does provide channels to highlight their systematic denial. Possibly stung by the publicity generated by the case, the Mexican government ordered the local labor arbitration board to recognize the Maxi-Switch union. But then the government turned around and permitted the company to change its name from Maxi-Switch to something else. That meant the Maxi-Switch union could be declared illegal on a technicality, which the company seemed prepared to do if the union kept pressing for the rehiring of workers previously fired for organizing.

Since the beginning of the NAFTA debate, a number of other U.S. unions have been active in Mexico, including the United Auto Workers and the Teamsters. The Teamsters have lent support to the FAT, and along with the UE and the CWA have filed or supported worker-rights complaints against Sony, GE, and Honeywell through the NAFTA mechanisms. The Union of Needletrades, Industrial, and Textile Employees (UNITE) has been developing efforts since 1996, when Mexico replaced China as the top textile and apparel supplier to the United States.

U.S. unions also backed a complaint against the systematic firing of pregnant women workers by *maquiladora* managers to avoid paying constitutionally mandated maternity leave. The petition, accepted in July 1997 by the U.S. Labor Department's national administrative office, the first stage in the NAFTA labor-rights review process, was brought by Human Rights Watch, the International Labor Rights Fund, and the National Association of Democratic Lawyers of Mexico.

*On November 10, the government labor board in Tijuana denied certification of the independent union on trumped-up technical grounds after a clear majority of the workers voted for the union.

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Cross-border cooperation has helped pick up the momentum of independent organizing in Mexico. U.S. unions are hopeful that the creation of the UNT will provide expanded opportunities. High-level delegations from the Teamsters and the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) were present to support the UNT at its formation in Mexico City last August. But even with a weakened CTM, Mexican workers are still up against "a wall of power," as it was put by a U.S. union official involved in the Maxi-Switch effort.

In recent years the AFL-CIO itself has reached beyond its traditional ties to the CTM to establish relations with independent Mexican unions. It cooperates with the San Antonio-based Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras, a coalition of more than thirty U.S. and Mexican religious and labor groups that filed a 1994 complaint against Sony for firing rebel workers at its Nuevo Laredo plant. There is now an AFL-CIO Mexico committee at the staff level which is aiming to coordinate wider cross-border efforts. But for the time being, U.S. unions continue to operate individually, and labor has a long way to go before it catches up with the internationalization of corporate business.

MEANWHILE, IN an effort little reported outside Mexico, up to a quarter million dissident Mexican teachers have been taking on their own union and the state at great personal risk. With salaries as low as thirty dollars a week, many teachers have to work two and three jobs to feed their families. But the leadership of the National Union of Education Workers (SNTE) invariably cuts deals with the government for meager wage increases. That has led to the formation of an opposition movement within the union, the democratically run National Coordinating Committee of the Education Workers (CNTE).

The CNTE has repeatedly defied the state-union machine to strike for better wages, free textbooks for children, and the release of teachers jailed for their union activities. The government has responded with bureaucratic runarounds and mounting repression. On Mexico's national teachers' day in May 1996, the CNTE stunned authorities when tens of thousands of teachers from a dozen states brought downtown Mexico City to a standstill with demonstrations and blockades. That, as much as soaring crime, led to the militarization of the Mexico City police.

According to Amnesty International, CNTE activists are being jailed, tortured, killed, or "disappeared" by security forces in the strongly indigenous southern states where the organization is strongest. Mexican rights groups say more than 150 dissident teachers have been killed since 1980. Bilingual Indian teachers command great respect in the indigenous communities of the Southern Sierra Madre, where anti-Indian and anti-teacher repression now coincide (see "Between Hope and History: Mexico's Indians Refuse to Disappear," *Dissent*, Summer 1996).

After a second rebel insurgency emerged in southern Mexico in mid-1996, Mexican military intelligence began tarring the CNTE as a front for the guerrillas, a pretext to arrest activists during counterinsurgency sweeps. According to *Mexican Labor News and Analysis*, the CNTE reported in September that there were arrest orders against at least 120 teachers in Mexico City and ten states in the southern and central regions of the country.

Last May President Clinton made his first trip to Mexico. The CNTE was joined by dozens of independent worker organizations in planning peaceful protests in Mexico City against NAFTA and U.S. influence over Mexico's economic policies. To prevent the type of mass demonstrations that occurred in May 1996, the Zedillo government set up police and military cordons throughout the city. Standing with Zedillo, Clinton said, "No two countries are working together on more important issues with a more direct effect on the lives of their people, than Mexico and the United States." The most direct effect on people that day was the arrest of scores of teachers who were to have led the protests, but instead found themselves in jails on the outskirts of the capital. ●

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Markets, in their Place

James B. Rule

WHEN HISTORIANS of ideas go to work on the last decade of the twentieth century, the market will surely appear as one of our intellectual totems. What the Rights of Man were to the French Revolution—or what Manifest Destiny or the quest for the Kingdom of God on Earth were to their times—the market is to our own.

Which is to say, ideas associated with the market are central elements of prevailing *ideology*. Ideological notions are relentlessly tendentious. Ideologies offer us plausible descriptions of the world and purport to explain why it is as it is—while, simultaneously, surreptitiously exhorting us. If we take them seriously, we cannot help favoring certain courses of action, certain social arrangements, over others. At their most powerful, ideologies are vague and subtle enough to make the image of the world that they convey seem almost unexceptionable. Yet they are relentlessly partisan.

Market ideology plays precisely this role in our own time. And this fact poses a historic challenge to the kind of thinking we do in *Dissent*. Where do we stand on the claims made by enthusiasts of markets? How can we relate such ideas to core values and assumptions of the democratic left?

As with many another ideological vogue, today's ascendance of market thinking is easily traced to key events in the times of its origins. Most dramatic among these is surely the collapse of the Soviet empire. One of the causes of that world-historic transformation was the inability of the Soviet command economy to compete with the dynamic, market-oriented economies of the West. At some point, Moscow obviously could simply no longer afford its increasingly desperate efforts to replicate the economic performance of its Western rivals. Its centrally planned economy could no longer sustain its international commitments—subsidizing Cuban sugar production, supporting guerrilla warfare in Africa, underwriting military allies in the Middle East, and so on—even as it proved unable to feed and house the Soviet population.

But even before the negative example of the Soviet collapse, evidence of the relative strength of market economies versus their centrally planned competitors was becoming apparent. Positive cases included stunning spurts of market-driven growth in hitherto poor countries—notably Taiwan, South Korea, and Singapore. The point is especially dramatic in some direct comparisons—Taiwan versus the People's Republic of China, South Korea versus North, West Germany versus East.

The conclusion here is nothing so crude as the superiority of the "Free World" over the "Evil Empire." Plenty of countries in the first category—from Bolivia to Burma—were as poor as South Korea and Taiwan in the 1960s, and have stubbornly stayed that way. The point is rather that for certain economies at a certain historical juncture, specific market arrangements have afforded dramatic growth. No centrally planned economy has generated results remotely like this in the sort of economic world that has prevailed since the 1960s.

It would be hard to overestimate the geopolitical repercussions of these dramatic spurts of market-driven growth. Certainly they have not gone unnoticed among the world's political elites—including the remaining old-line communist regimes in Cuba, China, and Vietnam. They, like their counterparts in Mexico, South Africa, Turkey, and countless other corners of the world, have drawn a fateful conclusion: in their own most narrow interests, they must move their countries into some form

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of world market participation. Thus, we see nervous efforts to attract foreign investments from regimes for which openings to outside investment come anything but naturally.

It's not just that these elites hope to pocket a piece of the investment action in their countries, though certainly many do. It's that no political class, right or left, wishes to preside over a state that is losing out in international economic competition the way the Soviet Union did. Only economic growth can supply the technological and military power indispensable to make a country count in today's geopolitical calculations. And the dramatic growth stories in recent decades have all been under market conditions. So, market arrangements are urgently sought after, even by those regimes that find them unnatural political bedfellows.

THUS, THE historical record of market power is considerable. And indeed, markets are useful for organizing all sorts of activities. Markets are institutions that allocate scarce things—from mousetraps to spouses to jobs—to the highest bidder, in processes supposedly open to all interested parties, and supposedly characterized by informed choice by all. Under specific circumstances and for specific purposes, markets are vastly more potent than alternative arrangements for getting certain things done. Yet the ideological mystique surrounding market thinking posits much more. It offers a vision of markets not just as efficient arrangements for coordinating complex activities but as a master design for all human affairs.

And here, of course, we part company. Essential values of the democratic left inevitably run on a collision course with full-blown market ideology. Above all, we take the strongest exception to the dictum of that earliest of market ideologists, Thomas Hobbes, that "The value or worth of a man, as of all other things, [is] his price . . . ." Our conviction is quite the opposite—that all sorts of crucial values may be "unmarketable" at any particular moment, in the sense that no one party may be willing or able to pay for them. These of course include values embodied in human lives. Children need to be nurtured, even if no one is available to bid for their affections; the weak or unlucky need a helping hand, especially in situations where they have little to offer on any market. And beyond values embodied in flesh-and-blood human beings, many other essential goods may find no adequate bidders in the markets in which they come available. An artistic heritage may need to be preserved; libraries may need to be maintained; national defense must be attended to; an environment may need to be preserved for generations not yet present to pay for it. In countless settings like these, we readily recognize essential *collective responsibility* for things that may have no adequate "market value" for any individual buyer at that particular moment. To acknowledge and act on such responsibilities is a classic role of the left.

This fact points to an even greater chasm between our position and that of market ideologues—regarding the guiding view of the "Good Life" or the "Good Society." For our opponents, that vision is a negative one. For them, freedom from constraint by others is the most anyone can hope for in social relations. The best society is simply the one that permits everyone to pursue his or her own private gratification—or to go to hell in the way of his or her own choice—with minimal interference from everyone else. In this view, the well-being of any one citizen is of no legitimate concern to any other, provided only that each individual makes his or her own way without interference through life's maze of market transactions. Thus, if my skills, luck, or other market advantages enable me to fill my swimming pool with Château Latour and dine on gazelles' eyes while my neighbors live in destitution, no one has grounds to complain. No more, if I should find personal happiness by marketing hate literature, faulty merchandise, or environmentally destructive products. If such outcomes result from informed market exchanges, and no one is coerced, the libertarian sensibility is satisfied.

Not for us. Our vision of the good society is to some extent inevitably *sociable*—which is to say, holistic. Many of the best things in life, we are convinced, can only be realized jointly, through shared participation in some form of political community. While diversity

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is a virtue and civil liberty indispensable, we take it as axiomatic that everyone is to some degree diminished when any members of the potential community are excluded. This means that we see positive virtue in democratic participation—as a good thing in its own right, as well as a check on injustice and abuse of power. The collective experience of entertaining, debating, and adopting a particular interpretation of the common good is an essential aspect of social experience—rather than only a means of settling inevitable practical questions of governance.

This vision in turn implies a certain measure of egalitarianism. This hardly means enforcing identical levels of material comfort. But it does require that all members of the community share access to the basic resources necessary for meaningful democratic participation. It requires, for example, that all citizens be provided with the tools—in terms of learning and information—to participate in public debate. It implies that everyone must enjoy at least enough leisure and peace of mind—including a basic level of material well-being—to be able to pay a modicum of attention to the public weal. Without such basic equalities, democracy is apt to be merely formal. People may go through the motions of voting, and elites may make a show of appealing to popular will. But the spirit of democracy, we hold, remains unfulfilled if its processes are dominated by the few with resources of time, money, and information unavailable to the many.

Market relations—it should be needless to say—do not necessarily foster such conditions; their effects are often quite the opposite. Markets readily leave those with more assets or more bargaining ability or more marketable skills—in short, more of whatever is selling on the market at the moment—in dominant positions. The unchecked aggravation of such differences, always a tendency in any market economy, is bound to undermine authentic democracy.

In these respects, then, our differences from thoroughgoing market ideology are profound. Yet market processes, I want to argue, are potentially constructive forces. Like firearms or nuclear fission, the problem is to secure their constructive application without unleashing the damage that their unrestricted use surely promises. Where and how, then, are we on the left to draw the line? What forms of marketization should we support? How do we define what is lost when market thinking goes unchecked?

OUR CASE is easiest against the most extreme forms of market ideology—those associated with libertarian politics, for example, or (more academically) the Chicago School of economics. These views do not simply extol the virtues of market arrangements in specific settings; instead, they sanctify the market as the paragon of all social relationships. Thus, relations of parents to children, teachers to students, elected representatives to their constituents—any and all of these are, or ought to be, governed by market principles. This is the outlook that would welcome the adoption of babies by auction, on the assumption that those with the strongest interests in being good parents will make the highest bids. A similar market approach, for that matter, has been proposed for the protection of endangered species: if only scarce whooping cranes or snow leopards were sold to the highest bidders, one could be sure that there would be someone with a strong (strictly private) interest in their perpetuation. So much for collective responsibility.

Even in our era of market euphoria, few will embrace this view of the market as absolute arbiter of social destiny. Most thoughtful observers accept that many important forms of allocation cannot be marketized without doing violence to their very logic. Instead, every political community must set certain minimal standards for the protection of common values—from the long-term health of the environment to the safety of the workplace to the educational development of the next generation—standards which cannot be undercut by bidding processes. Thus, we expect governments to embrace some sort of collective responsibility for informing the citizenry about drugs that are being marketed, or for ensuring national defense, or for guaranteeing a good education for every child, regardless of anyone's individual willingness or ability to pay for such things.

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But the current high tide of market ideology is wearing away at such taken-for-granted notions. Typically, the reasons cited have to do with the alleged "efficiencies" of market processes. The conviction is growing that all sorts of what should be considered collective responsibilities can be discharged more expeditiously by resorting to the market. This is a far more insidious idea than the thoroughgoing vision of All-Life-as-a-Giant-Market. No one really wants to come down *against* "efficiency," after all, even if the reckoning of that slippery concept is more than a little vague. This frame of mind can open the way for all sorts of projects ultimately destructive to key values of the left.

So what do we have to offer that's better? What limit can be set, what principle applied to the extension of marketization that is consistent with the kind of world we want to build? Given the press of market thinking in all areas of public life, it is hard to think of any question more important for the left.

My own response will probably differ from those of at least some *Dissent* readers. I am convinced that market arrangements may often be made to serve humane values—efficiency among them. Anyone familiar with daily life in the Soviet empire during the heyday of central planning will appreciate this point. The burden imposed on the human spirit by a system that leaves ordinary consumers with no option but to accept goods and services doled out to them by an overbearing, indifferent, centralized system is simply stultifying. Notwithstanding the considerable shortcomings of Western consumer societies, the market option to "just say no" to overtly unappealing commercial offerings is no trivial asset.

Yet no recounting of such market-friendly narratives can justify the sorts of ideological conclusions that one often hears—that if some market arrangements are good, more must always be better. Instead, we need to take a strictly *instrumental* attitude toward market relations: When and how will any particular market arrangement serve, or fail to serve, the sorts of democratic and egalitarian values of social participation that we consider fundamental? When do markets promise efficiencies that support the well-being of ordinary citizens and broaden the range of meaningful public choice in democracy? Where, by contrast, is marketization simply a Trojan horse for the abdication of essential collective responsibilities? And where are the "efficiencies" of markets simply a formula for a faster journey on a trip that no one should want to take in the first place?

Examples of all these things abound. One might well make a case, on grounds of efficiency, for marketizing certain aspects of public administration—say, by seeking bids from outside contractors for administering the payroll of the police and public prosecutors. But no one—I hope—will propose the thoroughgoing marketization of arrests and prosecutions, with such actions auctioned to the highest bidders. True, such a bold free-enterprise measure would inject new dynamism into law-enforcement activities. For that matter, it would surely help reduce the expense of government, making it possible to administer justice at a profit. The reason why we consider such a project bizarre is simply that it would lead to precisely the opposite of what we understand as "justice."

Such realizations point to something essential: markets are *created* by the wills and activities of real-life human beings; they are social institutions in their origins, and they remain subject to reconsideration, revision, and indeed improvement in relation to human purposes and values. Or to put it negatively: markets are not in any sense primordially "there" in every social situation, waiting for the chance to assert themselves in some natural form. Only human reason—and conscientious public deliberation—can distinguish between markets that sensibly serve key values and those that contravene them.

Thus it would be ridiculous for those on the left to seek a simplistic "thumbs up" or "thumbs down" on markets *in general*. Instead, we should be debating what kinds of things ought to be marketized, and—above all—what institutional form the markets we do favor should take.

A contemporary example may help. Consider what may at first appear as some recondite realities of American retailing. There ex-

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ists in fact a kind of "market" in this country for credit *customers*, as retailers compete with one another to consummate credit transactions for big-ticket items—cars, vacations, major appliances, and so on—with the most credit-worthy, and normally the most affluent, consumers. Serving retailers is a system that produces information on those customers—in effect, all of us—without our having much to say about this information flow, or even much knowledge of it. This is the consumer credit reporting system, an industry that sells information on "private" citizens' credit histories and ability to meet future obligations. The activities of this industry enable retail businesses to compete more effectively in the market for the most profitable deals with "private" consumers.

NOTE THE ironic contrast here between the vigorous, sophisticated market in information *about* consumers and the underdevelopment of meaningful market information on products *for* consumers. It is simply much easier for retailers to find out about consumers than it is for the latter to inform themselves about retail products. As consumers, we would be much better off if we only had access to reliable information on the products and services offered by our "market" economy—that is, how long the average new Chevrolet will last before major repairs will be required or how many of a particular merchant's customers are satisfied with the service provided after sale. Assuring consumer access to such information—most of which either already exists or could readily be assembled—would trigger market processes that would leave virtually all consumers better off. But only collective action by an informed public—in this case, legislation mandating the provision of such information—could overcome the inevitable political resistance of most businesses to providing it.

The lesson here is simply that the sorts of markets prevailing in American retailing today are those that serve the most powerful parties. Populist values would best be fulfilled here, not by suppressing market activity, but by invigorating markets that serve consumer interests. The proper task of the democratic left is hardly to oppose market relations categorically. Instead, we need tough-minded inquiry as to what sorts of market (and nonmarket) arrangements are likely to best serve the values and principles that we cherish.

Thus, the fact that "marketization" in our current political climate often represents a Trojan horse for inhumane, anti-egalitarian policies hardly means that markets must always operate in this way. But of course, many of them do. Often the global marketization of industrial production works to suppress jobs held by the most vulnerable workers in high-wage countries. Sometimes market competition among companies engaged in environmentally sensitive activities sharpens pressure to reduce investment in environmental protection. Sometimes privatizing public services, like trash collection or hospital administration, works to undercut the welfare of vulnerable public employees. There is no doubt that many of the programs pursued most gleefully by today's market enthusiasts are aimed precisely at cutting down resources devoted to human well-being and other values crucial to the democratic left. There is no reason why the left should acquiesce to such measures, any more than we should condone policies of political repression or ethnic discrimination or destruction of what ought to be the next generation's environmental legacy. But our opposition should stem from the destructive human consequences of these arrangements, not simply from the fact that markets are invoked to bring them about.

There will always be tension between the advantages offered by market arrangements and the inegalitarian tendencies often generated by them. Such tensions are not altogether bad, and in any case there is no escaping them—except through policies of uncritical market worship or equally uncritical market bashing. Rather than taking any such indiscriminate course, we need constantly to weigh the pluses and minuses of different possible market arrangements. In doing so, we must exert ourselves to ensure that the advantages of markets serve interests we defend. There will always be settings where it is apparent that market arrangements, prospective or real, cause intolerable suffering to the weak, the

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unlucky, or the uninformed; we should have no trouble opposing these. But we should also be on the lookout for ingenious possibilities for market institutions that would better serve popular interests.

But how much pain—and *whose* pain—should we be prepared to count against any gains that might be expected from markets? What principles should govern our efforts to resolve the tensions between prospective market efficiencies and the divisive, inegalitarian consequences that markets may bring? Obviously my stance here provides no ringing, one-size-fits-all ideological message. Like Karl Popper's famous riposte to another form of historicism, what I propose here amounts to "piecemeal social engineering"—an appeal to weigh the virtues and vices of specific market arrangements in their proposed or real contexts. The best advice I can think of for such evaluation has an ad hoc, seat-of-the-pants quality:

First, don't believe everything you hear about the superiority of markets in all matters. The "efficiencies" extolled by market enthusiasts may be self-serving, myopic, or both. Relaxing environmental constraints on logging may make the local wood-products industry more competitive in the short run. But it may also devastate tourism—a major source of revenue in many parts of this country—in the longer run. Much the same caution holds for matters of employment and job security. Downsizing an organization may help the bottom line in the short run. But, as Robert Kuttner points out in his excellent *Everything for Sale*, organizations also depend on the loyalty of their staffs. Employees who learn to think of themselves as dispensable to the organization may adopt work attitudes that lower productivity in the longer run.

Nor should we accept uncritically the stark trade-offs posed by many economists between welfare-state policies and employment levels. If one were to take many of these economic fables at face value, then we would expect all countries with highly developed welfare states to be drowning in unemployment. But one of these countries is Holland, with one of the lowest unemployment rates in Western Europe. It appears that, through tough bargaining between management and unions on the growth of wages, employment has been spread more broadly than in the other European welfare states. The willingness of workers to accept such innovations may just have something to do with their confidence in protections provided by the Dutch welfare state.

Second, when it comes to jobs and income, the weak deserve far more protection from market forces than the well-to-do. Restrictions on market competition have a long list of beneficiaries—many of them closer to the top of the social heap than to the bottom. The high cost of medicine in the United States derives at least in part from antimarket restrictions on entry into the medical profession. More authentic competition to provide medical services, among more qualified providers, could well reduce those costs. Similarly, the cost of milk to American families derives largely from state-mandated minimum prices that are guaranteed to producers. Of course, the beneficiaries of these anticompetitive practices see larger social purposes in their privilege—ensuring high quality standards in physician training, or preserving "the family farm" in milk production. These claims deserve to be taken about as seriously as tobacco companies' professions of ignorance (until recently) of the addictive qualities of their products.

By contrast, many of those threatened by market competition in their work are indeed underprivileged: low-skilled, low-paid workers faced with the movement of their jobs to places where even lower wages prevail; welfare recipients whose benefits are terminated with exhortations to find a place in the job market when there are simply no jobs; rubber tappers pursuing their environmentally sustaining craft confronted with market-driven destruction of the forest. There is nothing anomalous about seeking to protect the weak from the full blast of market competition while casting a skeptical eye on claims for similar treatment for the comfortable. The left would have a stronger case here if it distanced itself from defense of the right of French locomotive engineers to retire at age fifty-two or from the protection via tenure of evidently irresponsible university instructors.

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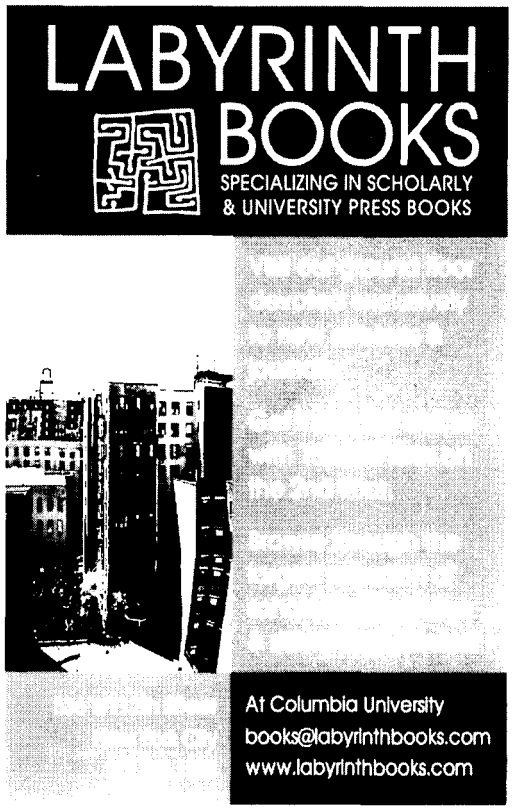
Third, when it comes to inefficient enterprises, be much quicker to protect individuals than institutions. Some institutions, of course, should never be intended to pay for themselves—the police and the courts, for example, or organizations devoted to defending children, the handicapped, or the homeless. But institutions that aim at producing marketable goods and services need to be held to market tests. The economic debacle of the Soviet empire—where ultimately no one knew the real cost of any good or service that was sold—demonstrates the destructive consequences of treating what should have been productive institutions as welfare cases.

Sometimes, in other words, economic institutions fail in their own terms, and that failure has to be recognized. Sometimes a particular enterprise, or a particular technology, or even an entire industry, cannot continue to produce things that people want at a price that people can afford. When this happens, as Schumpeter had it, a certain amount of "creative destruction" may be necessary to keep economic life dynamic.



BUT THE destructive consequences, where unavoidable, should be directed as much as possible to organizations, not to the people who work in them. When a particular line of economic activity declines or fails, it is the human lives involved that need to be saved. This may mean job retraining, grants to move staff to new places of employment, or countless other forms of social support that may not have immediate market justification. Our key obligations are to human beings, not to particular plants, production processes, or forms of work.

Finally, when you hear bloodthirsty policies put forward as mandated by "The Market," reach for your gun. "The Market" doesn't exist, even as a useful abstraction. Markets come in all forms and serve all sorts of interests. All of them are social creations. Only the most conscientious critical reflection can provide bases for deciding what domains of life should be governed by markets—and *what form* any such market should take.

We on the left need feel no categorical fear of market arrangements, then. We must be wary of market *ideology* as a Trojan horse for all sorts of schemes that are ultimately subversive of humane values. But market thinking need not always play that role, and it is our job to make sure that it doesn't. On the contrary, we want to seek out market processes that broaden meaningful consumer choice; or that spotlight productive organizations and ways of doing things; or that get the public's business done in the most expeditious way—always without sacrifice of crucial human values. When we do these things, we enable market arrangements to support democratic and egalitarian values, rather than to undermine them. Pursuing such goals offers a worthy agenda for the creative political and intellectual energies of the democratic left. ●

JAMES B. RULE's most recent book is *Theory and Progress in Social Science.*

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A Marriage Disagreement

Alix Kates Shulman

EARLY IN 1969, when my children were five and seven, I wrote "A Marriage Agreement" proposing that the tasks of child care and housework be divided equally between husband and wife. Like most women of my class and generation born in the United States before World War II, I had accepted, if sometimes grudgingly, traditional gender arrangements whereby the home belongs to women, the world to men. But during the previous year, when the electrifying ideas of women's liberation had lifted me out of my marriage into the world, I had become sensitized to the issue of traditional divisions of domestic labor by reading sister-Redstocking Pat Mainardi's satirical broadside "The Politics of Housework," then circulating in mimeograph (subsequently published in the 1970 collection *Notes from the Second Year*), which wittily detailed her mate's ploys for avoiding housework. That housework was up for political grabs, subject to maneuvering and negotiation, was only one of many previously unexamined premises of private life whose political bases were suddenly being exposed in the powerful light of feminist analysis. In a marriage complicated, unlike Mainardi's, by the presence of two impressionable children, I came to see domestic equity not only as simple justice but as one means of transforming society: by reforming the rearing of the young.

Before the Marriage Agreement, I had been writing for over a year, having begun on the morning I dropped off my youngest child at nursery school, freeing me for three hours a day (actually two-and-a-half hours, after subtracting fifteen minutes to deliver her and fifteen minutes to collect her). I wrote secretly at first, fitting my writing into the cracks between domestic duties, thinking it too self-centered and pretentious an activity for one who had, as the times required, dutifully renounced personal ambition in favor of family life, and I sent out my stories under a pseudonym so that not even my husband (to whom I'd made the mistake of showing my first effort only to hear him declare it "a shambles") would know I was doing it. My earliest writings—a children's book (with one human character, a boy); three chapters of a never-finished family novel; a long letter-to-the-editor of the *Village Voice*; and several short stories, including one about a baby-sitter, another about an abortion, and finally one called "Traps" about a woman leaving her husband—were written before I found the movement; but as it was only a few months later that I began attending meetings, the two activities, writing and women's liberation, those twin threats to my marriage, are inextricably connected in my mind.

Like so many lives, mine began to change drastically as soon as I connected with the movement. Among the mostly childless women in both small groups I joined—Redstockings, which favored theory, and WITCH (Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell), which favored action—I was surprised to find myself suddenly valued for the very identity I had long felt ashamed of: for being a genuine full-time housewife-mother. Those spunky young women, mostly in their twenties, treated me like a treasured resource instead of the useless has-been I considered myself at thirty-five, and I began to shed my diffidence—first in the group, then in my writing, though I prudently continued to hide from my husband the subversive nature of both. Even the marginal literary subject matter, female and domestic, to

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which I'd felt condemned by my limited experience, began to seem increasingly tenable subjects for fiction, and under cover of my pseudonym I started to submit my work to the new feminist journals suddenly springing up.

All at once, instead of finding humiliating rejection letters in my secret post office box I began to receive acceptances. Now there was an audience for "Traps," which appeared pseudonymously in the second issue (Winter 1970) of the feminist literary journal *Aphra* and eventually, in a slightly altered form, as the opening scene of my 1972 novel *Memoirs of an Ex-Prom Queen*. My first personal essay was a piece I volunteered to draft for my Redstockings group when someone pointed out that despite our extensive consciousness-raising on the topic of sex we had no sex article to hand out. Around the same time, through a contact with the (male) editor of a young-adult book series on "Women of America," I began a biography of the (then) forgotten anarchist Emma Goldman, whose works had all long since gone out of print. Based on my research I wrote essays on Goldman and on her sister anarchist Voltairine de Cleyre for the new *Women: A Journal of Liberation* (Spring and Fall issues, 1970), whose editors finally convinced me in the name of feminist courage to drop the pseudonym and sign my name.[1] Childless Goldman was impatient with women who remained in unhappy marriages, cavalierly asking (like certain second-wave feminists, whose gibes I sometimes fielded) why they didn't simply leave their husbands; to which de Cleyre, despite having refused on principle to marry the father of her own child, responded hotly: "Why don't you run when your feet are chained together? Why don't you cry out when a gag is on your lips? Why don't you raise your hands above your head when they are pinned fast to your sides?"—a disagreement in which I took a more than scholarly interest. So much interest, in fact, that by the time I came to write my Marriage Agreement I had done sufficient brooding on "the marriage question"—and had developed enough feminist confidence—to dare to revise my life in light of it.

My impetus for the Agreement, which I intended as a critique of the inequities of both conventional marriage and divorce, was based on my own recent bizarre experience with divorce lawyers. (The first working title for the piece was actually "A Divorce Dilemma and a Marriage Agreement.") My ten-year-old (second) marriage had become increasingly shaky as my husband, the father of my children, preoccupied by a new business he'd opened in a neighboring state and a clandestine love affair he'd begun there, was spending so little time at home that I felt virtually abandoned. His betrayal particularly galled because in marrying him and starting a family I had myself renounced sexual adventure and quit my editorial job to accept as graciously as possible what I, as a 1950 graduate of white middle-class Cleveland Heights High School, took to be my fate. Feeling the press of time (thirty was then generally considered the outside age for having a first child; when I met my second husband I was twenty-six), I had struck with my husband the traditional, if unspoken, romantic deal: I would be the devoted wife and mother, he would be the family man, the good provider.

(I remember the moment—back before we had children—when I was first stung by the profound injustice of the arrangement. I was standing at the sink washing the dinner dishes when, as he often did, my husband approached me from behind, untied my apron strings, slipped his arms around my waist, and began kissing the back of my neck to lure me away from the sink; when I shook him off, objecting that I needed to finish the dishes, he turned me around, looked me over with an expression of such disenchantment I can see it still, and said in a voice full of sorrow how dull, how matronly I looked in an apron standing over a sinkful of dishes.)

Tied down by two small children, I had strenuously opposed his new business, knowing that it would take him away from us, but he had gone ahead with it anyway. In turn, when he'd opposed my testifying about my illegal abortions as risking his reputation, I'd defied his wishes. Now, humiliated and angry over his affair (with a woman more than twenty years his junior, whom he finally married many years later) and terrified that the

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children would be deprived of their father's physical, emotional, and financial support (the little money I earned by freelance editing scarcely paid for the baby-sitter I hired a few hours a week), I fought back with all the strength I'd developed in the movement, soon taking a young lover of my own. The same feminist understanding and confidence that enabled me to stand up to my husband despite my dependency turned my love affair into a grand passion, complete with the orgasms I (like so many other heterosexual middle-class women of my generation, as we were discovering through consciousness-raising) had never experienced in fifteen years of marriage. Energized by my affair, bursting with sexual bravado, no wonder I volunteered to write the sex article for my Redstockings group. I titled the piece "Organs and Orgasms" and brazenly ended it with the admonition, "Think clitoris!"—one my husband, incensed by my admission that I'd long been faking orgasms, adamantly refused to heed.

Gradually our marital battle escalated, until at the end of each skirmish we were threatening one another with divorce grenades—now he would brandish the word, now I would, but in the end I was the bolder one. Or perhaps simply the more reckless. After all, what mere marriage could match the movement for excitement? Like other newly fledged feminists trying our wings, I was sometimes carried away by our own wishful rhetoric, soaring high into the clouds where feminism seemed invincible. Under the movement's spell we sometimes fancied raising our children together and growing old in joyful women's communities that would satisfy all our needs for companionship, sex, autonomy, power, and family, free of oppressive—or merely dull—marriages. Imagining women's autonomy, we demanded free, round-the-clock, universal child care and explored all sorts of alternatives to traditional marriage: free love, serial monogamy, lesbian partnerships, communal families, celibacy. Or we imagined ourselves as roving vigilante bands who through our indomitable solidarity would enforce our justice and wring compliance from men unable to live without us. For, contrary to media reports, women's liberation was not monolithically opposed to marriage. True, the group called The Feminists was against it, limiting to one-third of their membership women who lived with men, and Boston's Cell 16 was associated with a policy of celibacy; but my group, Redstockings, although sometimes divided on the issue, was concerned less with overthrowing the institution than with overhauling it to better serve women's interests by somehow forcing men to be responsible mates and reliable fathers. Staying in the heterosexual arena to do close combat—planting, as it were, a subversive in every bed—was widely seen as a far more effective way to topple male supremacy than was any separatist path. Indeed, one triumph of the early movement was to make men responsible for child care at large movement gatherings.

Nevertheless, many women did extricate themselves from intolerable relationships, and many others raised their standards of the tolerable. But with two children to care for and a hefty rent, I always returned to the nest before dark. Though our marriage was strained to the breaking point, I could not bear the thought of our children fatherless. Despite our love affairs, neither my husband nor I really wanted divorce, with our children so young and our entire domestic establishment at stake—though I, emboldened by the power and thrill of the movement and at once bolstered and shaken by its critique of marriage, was more willing than he to pull the pin and lob the deadly weapon.

Just as my husband and I had once searched among obstetricians for one who would quietly agree not to breathe life into a seriously deformed newborn, so now, inspired by feminism, we searched among lawyers for one willing to draw up a radical separation agreement that would give us joint custody of our children. (*We*? Rather, *I* searched, dragging us off to one lawyer after another in hopes of devising the sort of innovative divorce that would somehow render my husband at once a dependable hands-on father and a civilized hands-off mate—as if divorce were simply marriage by other means.) In the late sixties, however, it was not yet legally feasible to obtain joint custody in the State of New York. Although the idea had been explored experi-

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mentally in California, elsewhere it was still widely considered harmful to children for subjecting them to the vicissitudes of their parents' disputes and leaving them without a clear-cut line of authority. The first lawyer we went to, a smug, square-jawed traditionalist, literally laughed us out of his office—to my husband's relief and my fury. When we consulted movement lawyers, both leftist and (that newly emerging breed) feminist, whom I expected to be sympathetic to my ideas, they echoed the straight lawyer, warning us that if we didn't have a standard adversarial divorce we would be guilty of "collusion" and the divorce might not hold up (divorce by agreement was invalid, though all this would be changed by New York's 1975 divorce law reform); worse, if we insisted on joint custody, every time we had a disagreement or squabble the state would be free to step in and interfere, even, if it so chose, stripping us of custody of our children altogether. "Which is not so far-fetched, given your political activism," cautioned movement lawyer Carol Lefcourt. Acutely aware of the government's infiltration and subversion of the movement, I suddenly saw what folly it would be to invite Big Daddy into the heart of my family, no doubt to take the side of little daddy. Best not to marry at all, advised Lefcourt, but if married already, especially if there were children, safer not to be divorced.

Frustrated and fuming even as I laughed at these ludicrous legal conundrums, so oddly confirming of the anarchist case for having as little as possible to do with the state, I followed the lawyers' advice. Yet I could hardly fold my wings and meekly surrender to the status quo. If the law could not accommodate us, then why not sidestep it and design our own joint custody? In lieu of divorce, the finality of which terrified both me and my husband anyway, I decided to draft a private agreement to suit our needs. Instead of the unstated, conventionally gendered patriarchal rules we had unconsciously lived by before, I would formulate principles we could embrace consciously.

My husband, a large-minded but deeply traditional man, obligingly acquiesced—whether to ward off divorce, or out of conviction, or simply to humor me I'll never know. I do know that when I tried to involve him in thinking out our arrangement he took little interest. Perhaps he thought it trivial. Perhaps in the face of my relentless, to him fanatical, feminism he was merely practicing avoidance. Maybe he regarded the domestic concerns of such a document as outside his domain, despite our struggles. Or maybe he was just too preoccupied to be bothered. In any case, he left it to me. But then, why not? What had he to lose? With no sanction for the arrangement but our good will, if ultimately it didn't work out and shove came to slam or bam came to bolt, we could always hire two tough lawyers to slug it out.

It was with feminist irony, idealism, audacity, and glee that I sat down to compose my Marriage Agreement. Utilizing the methods of inquiry and self-examination I'd been developing through consciousness raising, I wrote down every task and detail of child care and housework I could think of, no matter how small, in order to discover and expose exactly what was involved in those trivial pursuits. Trivial? I'd show them trivial—and rub their noses in it!—from packing the children's lunches, taking them to the dentist, phoning around for a baby sitter, to cleaning, shopping, cooking, or stripping and remaking the beds. If these tasks were too insignificant to mention, then no father should mind doing them; and if some of them, like helping with homework, were as important as I thought or, like brushing their hair, as pleasurable, a father should treasure them. Having dropped out of Columbia's Ph.D. program in philosophy more than a dozen years before, it pleased me to apply my dormant analytical and critical skills to the minutia of domestic management. The daughter of a lawyer, myself a lawyer manqué, I took special pleasure in the precision of the document.

The criticisms it later sparked centered mainly on the details, though I'd tried to make clear in my commentary that these would obviously vary from family to family, and that the schedule must be flexible, subject to frequent revision and renegotiation. As my good friend, Jungian analyst Barbara Koltuv, who followed with a marriage agreement of her own, told a reporter, "Part of the reason for thinking out a

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contract is to find out what your problems are; it forces you to take charge of your life. Once you have the contract, you don't have to refer back to it. The process is what's important." But to me, the soul of the Agreement—even more important than the process—was its founding principles.

PART I. Principles.
1. We reject the notion that the work which brings in more money is more valuable. The ability to earn more money is a privilege which must not be compounded by enabling the larger earner to buy out of his/her duties and put the burden either on the partner who earns less or on another person hired from outside.

This principle went for the jugular of traditional marriage by challenging the basic rationalization of the division of labor in conventional nuclear families: money for services (which had been the unspoken basis of mine). To name earning power *privilege* was to challenge the very basis of value and strip the arrangement of its cover of justice. With what delight I penned that second sentence! And if it was unjust for "the larger earner to buy out of his/her duties and put the burden on the partner who earns less," then how comparably unjust must it be to put the burden on someone who earns still less. Let the man do his job, not buy out of it. Herein lay the utopian core of the document, its challenge to class society, plumbing purposes deeper than domestic guidelines. In the long wake of this first principle must eventually come equitable pay, universal child care, class and gender justice.

2. We believe that each partner has an equal right to his/her own time, work, values, choices. As long as all duties are performed, each of us may use his/her extra time any way he/she chooses. If he/she wants to use it making money, fine. If he/she wants to spend it with spouse, fine. If not, fine.

That last sentence was my code for sexual freedom, one of several messy subjects, including finances, I wasn't prepared to see muddy up the document. If this principle freed my husband to spend as much time as he liked in Pennsylvania as long as he pulled his weight at home, it also established my right, for the first time since I'd found the movement, to attend meetings as many nights as I chose without having to feel either negligent or guilty. It also gave me the right to go into my room and close the door to write, even with the children still awake or dirty dishes in the sink, when my husband was on duty. Quite a contrast to the way I'd felt as recently as 1967 when, on the eve of committing civil disobedience at a military induction center in protest against the Vietnam War, I'd begged my husband's indulgence (and, if necessary, bail money), knowing that if I were arrested I wouldn't get home in time to make dinner or get the children ready for school the next morning. And when my husband had tried to move us all to rural Pennsylvania to be near his work, I had felt willful and selfish refusing to go, knowing that a wife was supposed to follow her husband's job. No longer.

3. As parents we believe we must share all responsibility for taking care of our children and home—not only the work but also the responsibility. At least during the first year of this agreement, sharing responsibility *shall mean dividing the* jobs *and dividing the* time.

In principle, jobs should be shared equally, fifty-fifty, but deals may be made by mutual agreement. . . . The schedule may be flexible, but changes must be formally agreed upon. The terms of this agreement are rights and duties, not privileges and favors.

After these *Principles* followed *PART II: Job Breakdown and Schedule*, detailing chores and tasks involved with *(A) Children* (Mornings, Transportation, Helping, Night-time, Baby Sitters, Sick Care, Weekends) and *(B) Housework* (Cooking, Shopping, Cleaning, Laundry).

The Agreement certainly upended the original basis of our marriage—and my husband often complained that I was changing the rules on him, just as I, seeing the family man I'd thought I'd married become a traveling man, accused him of changing the rules on me. Nevertheless, in good faith we both believed that reestablishing our relations on an egalitarian basis was bound to improve them, freeing us from guilt and recriminations. I would no longer complain about his absence from the

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dinner table and he would no longer complain about my housekeeping. As it turned out, my husband, with higher standards of housekeeping than mine, did more cleaning than I. (A would-be bohemian, in my first marriage I had refused to own either a vacuum or a broom.) On my side, working as I did at home, I did more child care than he. But we genuinely tried for fifty-fifty, even if our compliance was somewhat erratic.

A few months after we began following the Agreement, we were rewarded when one of our children memorably said, "You know, I used to love Mommy more, but now I love you both the same."

THAT REMARK signaled to me that the time had come to write about and try to publish the Agreement. The first introduction I attempted told the divorce saga, complete with the ironies that had inspired me. But after a first draft I abandoned that strategy as tactless, introducing the document instead with a brief history of our domestic arrangements, pre-children and post-:

> When my husband and I were first married, a decade ago, keeping house was less a burden than a game. We both worked full-time in New York City, so our small apartment stayed empty most of the day and taking care of it was very little trouble. Twice a month we'd spend Saturday cleaning and doing our laundry at the laundromat. We shopped for food together after work, and though I usually did the cooking, my husband was happy to help. Since our meals were simple and casual there were few dishes to wash. . . . Our domestic life was beautifully uncomplicated.
>
> When our son was born, our domestic life suddenly became *quite* complicated; and two years later, when our daughter was born, it became impossible. We automatically accepted the traditional sex roles that society assigns. . . .

The article then goes on to describe the great changes and strains that overtook our marriage once I left my job to stay home with the children.

Entitled, simply, "A Marriage Agreement," the piece first appeared in the second issue of the new feminist journal *Up from Under* in August 1970. Over the next several years it was reprinted, with slight modifications, in such disparate magazines and books as *Redbook*, *New York* magazine, *Women's Liberation: Blueprint for the Future*, the premiere issue of *Ms.*, *Life* magazine, and eventually—indeed, to this day—in many sociological, feminist, and legal textbooks and anthologies, including the standard casebook on contract law compiled by Harvard Law School's late Lon Fuller.

Like other feminist proposals, mine was initially greeted with wildly divergent responses: it was called liberating or stultifying, reasonable or cracked, lucid or legalistic, principled or petty. Despite the upheavals of the sixties, the idea of shared child care and housework was then still widely considered unnatural and fatal to the male ego. And not only by traditionalists: in those days radical men, too, often felt justified in dismissing feminism as politically lame because of its concern for such distracting questions as who does the dishes. Even certain feminists, while agreeing with the principles of the Agreement, objected to its "legalistic" tone and purported rigidities. By the time of its apotheosis in a six-page spread in a 1972 *Life* magazine cover story, the Marriage Agreement was the subject of much debate in the popular press, where it was sometimes celebrated but more often derided by such antifeminist critics as Norman Mailer, Russell Baker, Joan Didion (in a front-page article in the *New York Times Book Review*), and (a little later) the infamous S.I. Hayakawa, who as president of San Francisco State College had summoned state troopers to suppress the 1968 student strike.

Even editors willing to publish it tried to subvert it. After it appeared in *Redbook* (under the editors' title "A Challenge to Every Marriage" and their cautious hedge that they found it "provocative") more than two thousand letters poured in, one of the largest responses in *Redbook*'s history. I was heartened to find that though some readers were hostile, far more were supportive, and all but a few took the proposal seriously—hardly surprising, given *Redbook*'s predominantly housewife readership. But when I published my analysis

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of the two-thousand–plus letters in *Redbook* a year later (September 1972), I was appalled to find the editors going beyond a mere disclaimer in their headnotes to misrepresent my entire analysis. I had avoided using percentages in my article because so many of the most thoughtful letters were too complex to categorize readily, but no such scruples restrained the editors, who reported their own percentages of letters *for/against/undecided* (36/53/11) as if they were mine, and edited my key paragraph to make it appear I agreed with them. I immediately protested such highhanded treatment and reluctantly gave my own, very different summary figures (60/30/10) in a long letter that was eventually printed on the letters page over an editorial apology.

STILL, CONTROVERSY was exactly what I wanted. I remember the mounting excitement with which I read Mailer's notorious attack on feminism, first serialized in *Harper's*—the same excitement with which I had once relished philosophical debate, the subtleties of law, and sexual adventure but had traded for family life. As I came to his concluding section, which opened by quoting in full the *Principles* of my Marriage Agreement, I exulted over having hit the mark. "No, he would not be married to such a woman," wrote Mailer of himself in the third person. "If he were obliged to have a roommate, he would pick a man. The question [with which he began his inquiry, Who finally would do the dishes?] had been answered. He could love a woman and she might even sprain her back before a hundred sinks of dishes in a month, but he would not be happy to help her if his work should suffer, no, not unless her work was as valuable as his own." Oh, exquisite triumph! The first principle of my Agreement, that a woman's work was by definition as valuable as a man's—indeed, that the comparison was henceforth impermissible, not least because absent the opportunity that must follow domestic equality no one could know what women might do—this Mailer could not swallow.

Perhaps it was the Agreement's very reasonableness that made it seem so threatening, transgressive, outrageous to men like Mailer. In fact, that tantalizing combination of reasonable and outrageous that colors so much early second wave feminist writing may account for the wide range of reader response. For though I certainly meant my proposal in earnest, I also relished the ironic face with which I presented it: a sardonic lift of eyebrow as I laid out the principles, a curl of the lip as I listed the tasks in excruciating detail, a wicked chortle as I mocked man's self-importance as a mere ruse for getting out of the dishes. The Agreement became another of those sly inside jokes, so common in those days, that knowing women crowed over together but that many men just didn't get—or perhaps, being their butts, got only too well.[2]

Though in his footnote to my article Mailer had carelessly cited *Off Our Backs* instead of *Up From Under* and had misspelled my last name with an *Sch*, at least he got the title right. Not so many another, who persistently referred to the Agreement as a Contract. Perhaps the mistake was set in motion by the inclusion of the Agreement (under its own name) in a sidebar in Susan Edmiston's provocative essay, "How to Write Your Own Marriage Contract," published in the premier issue of *Ms*; but when the error took on a life of its own despite my repeated objections, I could hardly avoid concluding there were political motives at work. *Agreement* sounds amicable and voluntary, whereas *contract* sounds adversarial and legal. Our arrangement, which we had established in part precisely to escape the law, had no legal status or intention; we simply wanted to divide up the duties for our own education and convenience, to improve things at home. Yet how easy to undermine our simple idea by substituting one word for another. Does this sound far-fetched? Consider: though I granted permission to Hayakawa to quote from my article only on condition that he use the word *agreement* instead of *contract* and even saw corrected galleys that met my condition before I sent in my written permission, in the finished book there was *contract* back in place in every instance where it had been changed to *agreement* in the galleys. Consider: though I got *Life*'s firm promise to use my title before I granted permission or signed a release, *Life* got around the restriction by using a huge one-

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word title, "CONTRACT," on one page opposite a sentence describing it on the facing page, in letters a fraction the size, as "A 50-50 Marriage Agreement." In the table of contents *Life* used the title "Living by Contract"; and on the cover, beneath a small photo of my husband and me—one of four pictured examples of "Marriage Experiments" that included: "Unmarried Parents in a Boston Suburb," a "Collective Family in a Big House in Berkeley," and a "Frontier Partnership in Idaho"—appeared the caption "Work-sharing Contract in New York," with no mention of *agreement* at all. Perhaps a mainstream journal like *Life* must inevitably try to tame and depoliticize everything between its covers: in the galleys of the article, the reporter, Patricia Coffin, had me spending my free time at art galleries instead of at political rallies. When I objected to this falsification it was corrected, but the offending *contract* remained.

Still, under whatever title, that *Life* coverage did help to get people thinking about alternatives to conventional marriage, including the controversial idea of domestic equality—so well, in fact, that when the magazine decided to do a follow-up of the major stories of the year for their late-December wrap-up issue, their April 28 report on "The Marriage Experiments" was among those selected. Good for the movement—but for one hitch: when Pat Coffin called to set up another interview, I had to tell her that my husband was on the West Coast and couldn't be reached.

What I didn't tell her was that, his business having recently folded, he had followed his young lover, then a student at Berkeley, to California. We had separated only months after our Marriage Agreement's appearance in *Life*. Much had happened to us in those brief months, including the nearly simultaneous publication of my first novel and collapse of my husband's business—events that together loosened our ties; but *Life* readers, ignorant of our private history, and not knowing that our Marriage Agreement was by then three years old, could easily presume a causal connection between the Agreement and our precipitous separation. Thinking of the fun Mailer and the others could have with the news of our breakup if they got wind of it, I dreaded an exposé—particularly when Pat Coffin suggested that perhaps she could interview each of us separately. I managed to put her off by fudging my husband's address, but I was terrified she would somehow discover his whereabouts.

When *Life* unexpectedly announced to the world that it would be folding before the end of the year, I was jubilant. Indeed, so powerfully did I feel the swelling force of the movement that I wondered if perhaps it wasn't my personal feminist genie that had delivered *Life* its death blow to save face for me and the movement. (Just as, following the signing of a book contract some months earlier, I'd suspected my genie of exterminating the editor who had laid a hand suggestively on my knee, and would again some months later suspect her of conveniently delivering back to me my compromising love letters only hours before my lover's fatal heart attack. Oh, the power of the movement!)

I REALIZE THIS confession may be construed in some quarters to feed the notion that feminism destroys marriages—a charge akin to the one that feminism destroys fetuses. In that feminism offers women the possibility of autonomy, giving us permission to leave a bad marriage or terminate an unwanted pregnancy, both accusations are partially true. Before feminism, divorce, like abortion, was often regarded as scandalous; until the 1970s, in many states the only ground for divorce was (criminal) adultery, the only ground for abortion threat to the mother's life, while now, thanks in part to feminism, divorce and abortion are widely accepted as basic rights. But that's only part of the story. As I once pointed out to a man who accused me of having caused his wife to run off with the baby after reading one of my novels, *he* may have had something to do with it, too. True, a few women, torn by ambivalence and carried away by movement rhetoric that seemed at times to condemn all marriages (and families) as oppressive, committed acts they later regretted—ending relationships, postponing pregnancies, leaving children—only to change their minds after it was too late. But many others acted without regret and some like me struggled in the name

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of feminism to improve family life by making it more equitable, flexible, and thus viable. As I wrote for a "Symposium on Marriage" in the feminist literary journal *Aphra* (Fall 1973—before New York reformed its divorce law): "Children will continue to be born and reared. Adults may fairly be expected to make sacrifices for them. Marriage insures that women will not be the only ones to make those sacrifices." My feminist intent was neither to bring down nor to shore up marriage but to improve women's lot within and without it.

Now, many years after my second divorce, looking back across a quarter century of social change to try to recover the feelings that led to my Marriage Agreement, I wonder if writing it was an act of political imagination, personal conciliation, or feminist revenge. I do remember the elation with which I wrote it; and I also remember that later, as I read letter after wistful letter from *Redbook* readers applauding the Agreement and envying me my "understanding husband" or begging for the secret of how I managed to get him to go along with it, I sensed an uncomfortable disparity between my power and theirs. It was not only that I had class and other privileges many of them didn't share, like rewarding remunerative work and no more toddlers at home. At that point, unlike most of them isolated in their disappointing marriages, I, fueled by feminist insight, anger, and pride, felt the power of a burgeoning movement backing me. The unspoken sanction for my Agreement, the secret force behind it (and a reason, perhaps, to call it a contract after all?) was my bottom-line willingness to divorce him if he wouldn't agree. I puzzled over the effect on the movement of admitting this straight out: would it help or hurt the cause?—help it by revealing the necessity of struggle, good will notwithstanding, or hurt it by exposing the all-but-prohibitive stakes? And later, as it became increasingly clear that our Agreement did not really "work" despite our best intentions—that, since my husband's work took him so often out of town, I continued to do most of the parenting (and gladly, too, knowing how much calmer and freer we each felt during our long stretches apart), and for the same reason, by default as it were, he let the housework slide, and eventually our marriage, like so many, foundered—I wondered which was better for the movement, particularly in face of the conservative attacks: to hide these failings or confess them?

But why, I wonder now, should the "failure" of my marriage, or any marriage, have seemed to me so potentially embarrassing for the movement—any more than the cancer death of food-reformer Adele Davis should have so scandalized the health-food movement? As if a person, or a marriage, should be immortal, or as if our marital breakdown must be laid at the door of our singular Agreement rather than of our accumulating disagreements. When dozens of feminist activists, myself included, had staged a sit-in on March 18, 1970, at the editorial offices of that bulwark of traditional gender roles, the *Ladies' Home Journal*, to demand a platform in its pages for feminist ideas, one of the reasons we selected that magazine was to challenge its famous monthly column, "Can This Marriage Be Saved?" (which Redstocking Ellen Willis proposed retitling "Can This Marriage"). Yet, despite that action, two years later I evidently still thought it my duty to shield *Life*'s audience from the truth about my own marriage, as if the point were to save it.

THE TRUTH? Like every ideal, our Marriage Agreement fell far short of the standard it proposed; indeed, it failed. Worse, its failure was as emblematic as it was personal: in the absence of economic equality and/or a strong movement, decades after women's liberation launched the battle over housework, married men in the United States still do precious little domestic labor—only 10 percent more than they did two decades earlier, according to one survey. *The Second Shift*, Arlie Hochschild's important study of divisions of domestic chores among married, predominantly middle-class working couples in families with young children, reports that what the women's movement began is now a "stalled revolution": only 18 percent of the husbands in the study did half the housework, 21 percent did a moderate amount, and 61 percent still did little or none, though their wives held down outside jobs. And even among couples who share more equitably in the work at home,

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"women do two-thirds of the *daily* jobs, like cooking and cleaning up—jobs that fix them into a rigid routine," while men do less-frequent tasks like fixing appliances or changing the oil in the family car. *Families on the Faultline*, Lillian B. Rubin's recent examination of working-class families, shows that many working-class men who would not even pay lip service to gender equality two decades ago are now "quite sensitive to the needs and wishes of their wives"; yet because they fail to translate this sensitivity into action, the housework question is now often "a wrenching source of conflict." [3] In fact, according to Hochschild, "the most important injury" to women in unequal marriages is not the unfair leisure gap between the sexes, not women's exhaustion from the double day, but rather that they "carry into their marriage the distasteful and unwieldy burden of resenting their husbands."

Conflict, discontent, resentment: a bitter legacy. And with consciousness changing so much faster than practice, and far more on the part of women than of men, discontent and resentment must be at record highs. Hard on the children (like our own, who unfortunately were spared none of the hardships of growing up in an embattled household; for after that first separation my husband and I got back together and remained married until the children were grown); hard on everyone involved. Still, an improvement over the cavalier dismissal of housework as "trivial," and better by far than the unconscious, pre-feminist alternatives, which, in any case, have become increasingly untenable now that most women, regardless of class, race, or age of children, hold down outside jobs.

Yes, our Marriage Agreement failed, and our marriage after it. But the unbearable status quo, to challenge which I had written the Agreement in the first place, also collapsed—fell in a whirling freefall that, like so many utopian fictions and experiments, landed us somewhere we never imagined. Once the feminist challenge pushed open the door on traditional marriage and took a good look inside, it could not be the same again. Even though the goal of domestic equality between cohabiting parents is honored—like the marriage vows themselves—mainly in the breach, at least it is now a commonplace, no longer an outrage. Despite the gloomy news on actual housework done, the *ideal* of egalitarian marriage has steadily grown (espoused by 48 percent of the wives in Hochschild's study, if only by 20 percent of the husbands), that of traditional gender roles within marriage has steadily shrunk (down to 12 percent of the wives and 18 percent of the husbands), and the rest (40 percent of the wives and 62 percent of the husbands) are somewhere "in transition."

PARENTING IS still profoundly gendered, and the nuclear family is still the setting vastly preferred for child-rearing, but in fact fewer and fewer children grow up in a traditional household or even one where both biological parents reside. Instead, to accommodate paternal flight or enact eternal hope, there has been an irrepressible proliferation of new de facto forms of family life—from jumbled, blended, divorce-extended families to single-parent, lesbian or gay domestic partnerships, and even the occasional innovative experiment. In a May 14, 1994 column in the *New York Times*, Peter Steinfels proposed a "thought experiment" doing away with legal marriage altogether: "The state would have nothing to do with it. The whole business would be strictly a private agreement. . . . The only thing that would be essential is that the couple—or the triad or the quintet—agree freely. . . . The number, the sex, the hierarchy or permanence of spouses in any household would be no more a matter of legal requirement—or ultimately, of social concern—than the number or size of the rooms."

Such proliferation ensures that even in the face of punishing institutional biases that restrict nontraditional families' rights, traditional hierarchical marriage will not again be monolithically entrenched. But it does nothing to correct or even address the gendered division of labor that permeates our society. It is this domestic inequality, not the form or legitimacy of marriage, that continues to worry me. Not that I don't have a cheer for every imaginative or brave attempt. But the inevitable slippage between intentions and their outcomes, particularly in the absence of a

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strong feminist movement, keeps me asking cautiously of each, Who will benefit, who will lose, and who will wind up with the housework?

Still, as an incurable movement person, for all my skepticism I can't help hoping that if attitudes keep on changing at the rate they have, then maybe, just maybe, in another twenty years . . . ●

ALIX KATES SHULMAN's most recent books are the memoir *Drinking the Rain* and a 25th anniversary edition of her novel *Memoirs of an Ex-Prom Queen*.

[1]Ardent feminist though I was, my consciousness changed slowly. Except for the story "Traps," published under my pseudonym, all my early writings were signed with my married name, Alix Shulman; not until 1972, just before publication of my first novel, did it occur to me to reclaim my maiden name Kates, even though I had for several years been cheering the work of such self-named feminists as Kathie Sarachild, Betsy Warrior, and Laura X. Since by that time I had already published three children's books, two edited collections, and one biography, all under the name Alix Shulman, I felt it would be imprudent to switch midstream to my maiden name, so I compromised by inserting it in the middle. But I've always regretted that I didn't drop my married name then. When I was finally divorced in 1985 I tried to delete Shulman in my private life—the name on my checkbook, for instance, is Alix Kates—but even then I wondered how my children must feel seeing me shed their name.

[2]Several years later I met Mailer at a book party for a children's anthology to which we had each contributed a story and introduced myself as the author of the Marriage Agreement. NM: That was a dumb idea. AKS: Only if you didn't get it. NM: You mean it was supposed to be ironic? I missed that. AKS (throwing Mailer's own familiar slur back at him): That's because you antifeminists have no sense of humor. NM (pausing to scratch his head, as he fails again to get it): Hmm. That's what I always say about you feminists.

[3]Rubin notes that housework more than child care is at issue in these families, "for despite the enormous ferment in family life over these last decades, the cultural definition of the good parent has changed little. Parenting . . . remains woman's work. It's mother who's still held accountable for [the children's] moral development, their emotional stability, and their worldly success or failure. Father need only make a living for them to satisfy his part of the bargain. Any unanticipated ripple in the children's development is quite simply mom's failure." The exception is in black families: "Black men are the most likely to be real participants in the daily life of the family and are more intimately involved in raising their children than any of the others. . . . Compared to their white, Asian, or Latino counterparts, the black families look like models of egalitarianism. Nearly three-quarters of the men in the African-American families in this study do a substantial amount of the cooking, cleaning, and child care, sometimes even more than their wives."

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Pluralism and Social Democracy

Michael Walzer

I WANT TO TALK as a philosopher today—a practical and engaged philosopher. I won't argue for particular policies, but I also won't remain at the level of abstract principles. If philosophy is to engage with politics, it had better be political, not metapolitical, philosophy. What should practical political philosophers do? They have to analyze, criticize, refine, and revise the values and commitments of their fellows, and then they have to describe honestly the difficulties that these values and commitments encounter in the contemporary world: the nature of the opposition, the sites of political struggle, the institutional obstacles, and the general tendency of the necessary reforms.

The commitments of the left today are what they have been. We are not light-headed; seriousness has been one of our historical marks, often to a fault. So you will immediately recognize the following tripartite structure. The left is committed to the idea of (1) free men and women (2) breaking out of the age-old patterns of superiority and subordination, and (3) creating a cooperative commonwealth.

Liberty, equality, solidarity: our understanding of these three has changed over the years, but the deep commitments endure. Let me take each of them in turn.

(1) *Free men and women.* What qualifies them as free is the capacity to choose for themselves—their projects, associations, work in the world, their friends, lovers, and comrades. This means that the world must be open to their choices (which is not to say that they will always get what they want) and also that they must have the inner resources to sustain a life of choice, so that they both are and remain autonomous men and women. We don't (any longer) admire people who make themselves agents of historical necessity, instruments of an all-powerful party, disciples of a sectarian leader, ideological or religious zealots. Nor, however, do we accept the postmodernist illusion of pure self-creation, the contemporary form of intellectual egotism. Human beings are social creatures, who are capable of freedom precisely because they are particular people, with families and histories, language and culture. They are citizens of countries, members of groups; they are shaped, nurtured, socialized by other people, in a specific time and place; character and identity, distinction and individuality are slowly acquired, with the help of the others and also, often, in rebellion against them.

THE PROJECTS of free men and women are inherited as much as they are invented. "You are not bound to finish the work," says an old Jewish proverb, "but neither are you free to give it up." In fact, of course, you are free to give it up, and that's an important part of what freedom means. It's not, however, the whole of freedom's meaning: indeed, if there were no projects of such value, so central to our lives that we were prepared to impose them on our children, the freedom to choose (or refuse) would be very nearly meaningless. Because we can imagine valuable projects that span generations—the creation of a just society, say, or, at least, the argument about what a just society would look like—we are not sympathetic to a radical individualism. The freedom to do whatever one wants with one's life, or one's body, or one's time and energy, or one's money has never been obvious

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to people on the left. Against religious orthodoxy and social conformity, the demand for free choice, the defense of experiment and innovation, is legitimate, important, stirring. But even the freest of men and women still experiment and innovate under moral constraints, which derive from the social and political world that is their inheritance as well as, sometimes, their burden.

They inherit projects and arguments, which they then join, elaborate, revise, or reject. There are many projects and arguments, and it is this pluralism that makes individual choice possible. But pluralism is not the product of individual choice, except in a very special sense: it is the product of diverse cultures, groups, traditions, parties, and movements sustained across generations by men and women who willingly take on the "work" urged by their parents or predecessors. I suppose that we ought to value bold, free-wheeling individuals who refuse such work, who break loose from all the groups and then choose among them, or among their "fragments," and so fashion their own identity: these are the heroes of postmodernism. But we must recognize also that these heroic figures are radically dependent upon the people who stay behind, who inhabit the groups and keep them alive.

Many of our most important groups are in the sociological sense involuntary associations: families, nations, classes, religions, even, often, political parties. We don't decide to join; we are enrolled by our parents (hence one of the few reliable discoveries of political science: the best predictor of party allegiance is parental party allegiance). We can only decide to stay . . . or not. Solidarity is an experience before it is a choice. What is crucial for freedom is not that the choice come first, which would require that all social groups be dissolved and formed anew in each generation. What is crucial is that, if one is born into these or those groups, it is possible for one to get out—and, having gotten out, it is also possible for one to find alternative associations. But this freedom to come and go requires that there be *somewhere* to come from and go to: it requires a genuine pluralism, a diversity of groups with members who are engaged, entangled, committed, hard at work. Ultimately, what makes it possible for me to choose is the fact that other people *have chosen* (or have simply stayed on where they were planted by their parents) and so have kept alive a way of life, a community that I can enter (and exit). I can't be a political adventurer or a cultural vagabond unless other people are settlers. The commitment to freedom, then, requires support for settlement or, better, for a variety of settlements. It requires some resistance to (what I have elsewhere called) the Four Mobilities—social, geographical, familial, and political—that undercut class loyalties, shatter neighborhoods, break up families, cut deeply into party commitment and membership.

Mobility is the mark of a free society, whose members are self-determining men and women: they move among the various groups and associations, across ethnic, religious, ideological, and sometimes political frontiers; they experiment with commitment. But if they move so fast and in such numbers that the groups and associations cannot sustain an inner life, and if they experiment so casually that they are not marked by the experience, the freedom to move and experiment will become less and less significant. Freedom will undercut itself unless there is a collective effort to cope with its effects: to create and re-create stable social settings—families and communities—that produce strong individuals and provide them with seriously and interestingly different possibilities.

From all this there follows the left's continuing commitment to education as a public project (as well as a series of private, communal projects) of a certain sort: democratic, decentralized, experimental. The public schools always have a double task. First, they must provide students with a clear and firm understanding of the substantive values and also the constraints and burdens that make up their common citizenship—and their other (religious, ethnic, racial) affiliations and allegiances too. The schools sponsor one kind of belonging and accommodate the others. But they are also agents of individualization. And so, second, they must help students acquire a sense of their own critical capacities. If students inherit the "work" of previous genera-

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tions, they must nonetheless choose for themselves what to do with it, how (and whether) to carry it forward.

(2) *Breaking out of the old patterns of superiority and subordination.* We want to create a society in which men and women are free from the domination of the wellborn, the wealthy, and the powerful. This doesn't mean that they must be absolutely equal in status, wealth, or power. Simple equality of that sort is the bad utopianism of the old left. Anyone who has lived in the twentieth century or studied its history knows that political conflict and the competition for leadership always make for power inequalities, and that entrepreneurial activity always makes for economic inequalities, and that everyday social communication—gossiping, boasting, admiring, and judging—always makes for status or reputational inequalities. None of this can be prevented without endless tyrannical interventions in ordinary life. It was a historical mistake of large proportions, for which we have paid heavily, to allow socialism to be identified with tyranny of that sort.

Too many Old Leftists made equality the enemy of liberty, and this hostile relationship has become a standard maxim of liberal political philosophy. The maxim is partly, but only partly, true: there is a natural tendency toward inequality in all the spheres of production and distribution, and there is a further tendency, more dangerous, for individuals who have acquired superiority in one sphere to use that superiority to advance themselves in all the others. They use their wealth, say, to buy political office or influence, or places for their children in elite universities, or better forms of health care than are available to anyone else; or they use their political office to extort money from citizens seeking their help, or to organize special services for themselves, or, again, to advance the careers of their children. These efforts ought to be interfered with; the freedom that they manifest ought to be constrained. But this constraint doesn't serve equality alone. For the conversion of one social good into other goods with which it has no intrinsic connection is itself a tyrannical act. And so political interventions to prevent or inhibit such acts, and to maintain the autonomy of the different distributions, also represent a defense of freedom. The constraint of some is necessary to the freedom of many.

Interventions of this sort, to limit the reach of political power or constrain the cash nexus (so that all social goods are not up for sale), make it possible for different individuals, differently endowed, with different interests and ambitions, to pursue different goods, confident that the goods are actually available for pursuit and can be had for the "right reasons"—because of need or talent or interest or achievement. Insofar as goods are differently available, the resulting distributions won't be determined by the standard forms of domination and usurpation. The distributions will make instead for "complex equality," which is to say for radically dispersed and disaggregated inequalities. Different people will be unequal in different ways, but these inequalities will not be generalized across the spheres: all social goods won't come in train to the same people. Ideally, this should make possible a society free from social tyranny, where individuals are up or down with reference to this or that good, but no one is up or down everywhere; no one is degraded; no one is exalted; arrogance on the one hand, fear and deference on the other, cease to be the normal emotions of social interaction.

This is a hard achievement; no such society yet exists. Indeed, there are signs that after a period of moving toward complex equality, we are now moving away from it. Or rather, the liberal democratic and social democratic societies of the West have actually achieved something like complex equality (a modest version) for some part of the population, the top two-thirds, say, though the position of many of these people is precarious. But another part, the lower third, is coming increasingly to experience a radical exclusion from all the productive and distributive spheres—in the form of unemployment (in Europe) or underemployment or employment only in the "second sector" of the economy, where government regulations are rarely enforced, health insurance and pensions are not available, and collective self-defense is virtually impossible

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(the American pattern). Among the top two-thirds, inequalities of institutional power, wealth, educational attainment, prestige, and leisure are at least relatively dispersed—in comparison, say, to earlier social formations. Here people get something closer to the health care they need, the jobs they qualify for, and the schooling they want or can manage, than their grandparents or great-grandparents did: this is the (limited) success story of left politics. In the lower third of the population, however, exclusion from all these goods, or minimal realization of them, produces an intensified inequality from which there seems no escape.

THE POLITICAL left today includes many people from the first part of the population, who live in more or less just social settings and join in associations that defend these settings—and find the defense increasingly difficult. At the same time, the left is, or should be, committed to the excluded men and women of the second part. What this means in practice is that all left parties and movements are internally divided between those people who have already benefited from egalitarian policies and those who have benefited minimally or not at all. Fear of falling in the first group, resentment and anger over having fallen (or being down) in the second group, make many of their members susceptible to a familiar kind of populism, which readily takes rightist, chauvinist, or fundamentalist forms. As we used to say, these people are "objectively" on the left, since that is where their interests presumably lie, but they are often mobilized elsewhere.

Because of technological transformations and economic globalization, and also because of an aggressive campaign on behalf of laissez-faire ideology and market power, more and more people in the "advanced" countries of the West are actually in danger of sliding from the first part of the population into the second. And for these same reasons, the social and economic integration of the second part is increasingly problematic. I am not going to try to sort out the causes of the dangers and the problems; they are fiercely debated by people who call themselves experts. But I do want to stress that these causes are not impersonally or world-historically determined; some of them, at least, are local, willful, and political. They have to do with the self-aggrandizement of the few and the weakness of the many. They have to do with the decline of the parties and movements of the left. They have to do with market imperialism and the failed defense of autonomous distributions in politics, education, welfare, health care, and so on.

INSOFAR as these last points are true, local remedies are available, even if they are not likely to be entirely sufficient: they are the work of leftist parties and movements resisting the power of money in politics; of trade unions defending the material interests of their members in the labor market; of teachers insisting upon the independence of their schools, refusing to serve political purposes, reaching out to children in trouble; of health care professionals looking for ways to help the most vulnerable of their patients; of welfare workers who won't live by the "bottom line" or consign needy people to the discipline of the market.

But all this won't be enough to bring in the growing number of excluded men and women. Ultimately, they have to bring themselves in, and that self-help depends upon the inclusiveness of citizenship and the support of the larger political community.

(3) *Creating a cooperative commonwealth.* The solidarity of citizens (the French Revolution's "fraternity," extended now to men and women alike) is a complicated business. Solidarity can be dangerous when it is only a feeling, an emotional substitute for, rather than a reflection of, actual, on-the-ground, day-by-day, cooperation. The sense of closeness with other people has to be earned—by fighting together or working together for a cause; responding together to difficulty, crisis, natural disaster; studying a common history and literature; celebrating the holidays, enacting the rituals of a common life. In the modern world, however, none of this can be a uniform collective experience, and every effort to make it that is inauthentic. The mix of groups, cultures, and histories is an inescapable feature of all "advanced" (and most "advancing")

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societies. Closeness today can only come from a series of reiterated experiences, different for different people and for different groups of people, but related and overlapping—so that I fight, work, study, celebrate, and so on, in a variety of social settings, with a (changing) variety of other men and women. National and ethnic chauvinism is a predictable reaction to this differentiated engagement with otherness; it represents a radical demand for simplification and homogenization in a world that will never again be simple and homogeneous. But citizenship, properly understood, can incorporate difference, and social justice is served only if it does.

People experience solidarity separately and differently. This is not a paradox, but a simple fact about modern life. I suspect that it is a fact about social life generally, in all times and places, but it is brought to the fore by the multiple processes of differentiation that are a feature of our own time. We learn to be citizens in many different associations: neighborhoods, churches, unions, professional groups, parties and movements, societies for mutual aid, and so on. The more intense our participation at this level, in these settings, the more engaged we are likely to be as citizens of the larger community. Solidarity must have its local and particular sites; it is built from the ground up. Efforts to begin at the top, government-led campaigns for Americanization or Russification, say, or populist campaigns against foreign immigrants and "alien influences" reflect a loss of faith in the democratic construction of a common life. They make for a false solidarity, which won't be able to meet its moral or political tests.

The test of solidarity, the mark of a cooperative commonwealth, is mutual aid—the recognition of our fellow citizens, all of them, as men and women toward whom we have obligations by virtue of the fellowship. That is why it is so important that the fellowship be concretely enacted, so that we are actually engaged with one another, not all of us with all of us (for that cannot be a realistic engagement), but some with some, in a great plurality of associations and activities. Mutual aid will be one of these activities, coexisting with the others and deriving from them its obligatory character. The welfare state will never work well, and won't be sustained in hard times when budgets are tight, unless it rests on a welfare society, unless the work of government officials and professional helpers is seconded by the work of amateurs, neighbors, volunteers, who are simply fellow citizens. Excluded men and women must be participants in this welfare society, helped to help themselves in the most concrete ways, in the most local settings, before they can function effectively in the larger society and in the different spheres of production and distribution.

I HAVE NOW sketched an argument for the necessity of pluralism—in support of freedom, and of equality, and of solidarity. The pluralism that supports freedom is constituted by ethnic, cultural, religious, and political traditions and the groups of men and women that sustain them. Without these traditions and groups we would never acquire the minimal endowment (of identity, character, worldview) that makes coherent choice possible.

The pluralism that supports equality is constituted by the different social goods, and the autonomous spheres within which they are produced and distributed, and the associated men and women—workers, teachers, doctors, clerics, journalists, civil servants, and so on—who work within those spheres and defend their autonomy. Without that defense, the most important goods will be seized by a single group of people: the wealthy, the powerful, or the well born (or, a real possibility these days, the highly educated)—a different group in different times and places, but alike in its singularity and in its eagerness for domination.

The pluralism that supports solidarity is constituted by the whole set of groups and associations where people come together to sustain a way of life or uphold a conception of justice or defend a set of interests. If for every individual there was one and only one association, solidarity would be parochial and limited, and group conflict would be intense, endless, often deadly. It is a great mistake for protagonists of "identity politics" to advocate this kind of singularity. In fact, ethnicity, religion, profession, work, and residence make for multiple identities—and some of these are them-

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selves divided and ambiguous as a result of immigration, intermarriage, two-career families, social mobility, and so on. But all the multiple and divided identities are enclosed within the bounds of citizenship. If singularity is impossible, commonality isn't. The activists of all the different groups must deal with one another not as strangers but as fellow citizens with similar or at least related and overlapping concerns.

Politics is the art of bringing these tangled dealings into some coherent pattern. No doubt, this gets more difficult in more highly differentiated societies; the argument about multiculturalism in the schools reflects these new difficulties. At the same time, the multiplication of difference brings more and more people into political life, multiplying also the sites and settings for both competitive and cooperative activity. The more sites and settings, the more points of entry, the more associations where cultures are enacted and values sustained, the more opportunities for the collective defense of interests, the greater the number of engaged men and women—the more free and egalitarian society will be. But I am not talking about the freedom of self-created individuals to do what they please; nor am I talking about the equal possession of all social goods by all men and women. These are not realistic possibilities; they are not even attractive utopias. I am describing both freedom and equality in complex and socialized forms, and my claim is that they really can emerge coherently out of a full-scale pluralism.

With a little help from the state. Social democracy was for too long identified solely with the state and with the project of "seizing state power." But as a political practice it must begin, as I have begun, with the multiple associations of civil society—which include, of course, the unions, parties, factions, editorial boards, and youth groups of social democracy itself. Since Robert Michels wrote his grim account of "the iron law of oligarchy," these have rarely been the subject of theoretical reflection. And yet what social democracy implies is the democratization of society. Oligarchic tendencies in this or that organization raise difficulties for, but don't necessarily block, this project. The plurality of associations (there are some two hundred thousand "voluntary associations" in the United States), the possibility for people to "vote with their feet," the intermittent rebellions and institutional reformations that make oligarchy an always unstable arrangement—all these suggest that democracy in society does not require free elections in every group. Sometimes, indeed, we are well served by more-or-less permanently empowered staffs: we don't have time for all the meetings that greater democracy would require. But we do need some ultimate recourse against social tyranny. And that the democratic state must provide.

Examples of social tyranny can be found in almost all the groups that make up civil society. One of the chief tasks of social criticism is to give them their proper name, to say that *this* is tyranny—whenever religious or cultural associations perpetuate longstanding oppressive practices (the denial of education to their women members, for example); or whenever the company of men and women who control the market or the state dominate all the other distributive spheres; or whenever all the groups, or the strongest among them, adopt exclusionist policies, denying the everyday opportunities of social life to immigrants or blacks or Jews or any set of stereotyped and degraded "others."

In all these cases, state power is the necessary instrument of justice. It has to be brought into play with great care, for it is a power radically disproportionate to, and therefore dangerous to, the different groups that coexist in civil society. So it should be used only in response to cries of oppression and demands for justice that come from within society itself, and only in association with and in support of the self-defensive efforts of the oppressed. But it must be used; that is what the state is for. And if it is to serve its purpose, the state must be more fully inclusive and democratic than any of the groups whose activity it regulates. Its citizens must be citizens in the fullest sense: politically educated, competent, and informed; possessed of the complete set of civil rights and liberties; and, most important of all, organized in the widest possible range of parties, unions, movements,

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circles, schools, groupings, and so on.

The state regulates civil society, but it is itself constituted as a democratic state by the civil society that it regulates. The singular, universal political community requires a particularistic associational life; the associations require the political framework of state power. The one depends on the many, the many on the one. This isn't a vicious circle; it is the deep structure of democratic politics itself.

It is not easy to say what the state should be doing to sustain this structure right now, in the context of a rapidly globalizing economy whose protagonists already claim that state power is an anachronism. I want to make only one point, which is crucial to any leftist defense of pluralism. All the groups that I have described, on which we depend for individual freedom, complex equality, and social cooperation, are threatened today by the hegemony of the market:

(1) The communities of culture, history, faith, and political commitment that provide individuals with the content of their character and give them their first experience of solidarity are institutionally weaker than they have ever been. The careers they offer, to the parish priest, say, or the union organizer, or the editor of the party paper, meet the demands of moral idealism but not of economic ambition. The allegiance they require is incompatible with the contemporary forms of social mobility. The stories they tell are less immmediately exciting than those of an increasingly commercialized mass culture. And in a radically individualist society governed by market forces, economic ambition, social mobility, and mass culture are increasingly dominant.

(2) In all the spheres of distribution, groups that defend internal standards—health care for the sick, housing for the homeless, education for all the children who are capable of learning—are increasingly challenged by the theory and practice (the two brought together in ways that should make the left envious) of the market price and the profit margin. But the market is incapable of helping the growing number of excluded men and women; it won't provide them with jobs or underwrite the autonomy of nonmarket spheres of activity.

(3) The welfare services that arise within civil society, the kinds of mutual aid sponsored by churches, unions, and fraternal organizations, are also in trouble: they have for a long time depended upon state subsidy as well as upon voluntary contributions of money and time (in the United States, more than 50 percent of the money spent by religious organizations on welfare services comes from public funds), and state officials are under increasing pressure to turn to private, for-profit forms of social provision. But these do best for people who are already doing well, leaving behind a growing number of men and women who are effectively deprived of all but the most minimal services, provided by underpaid civil servants or exhausted volunteers, with always inadequate resources.

ALL THIS is more visible in the United States, perhaps, than in European countries, but it is everywhere the way things tend. And there is no way to resist the tendency except by invoking the solidarity of citizens and using the state's power to collect and allocate money.

Social democracy depends upon the vitality of associational life. But the associations that we value most highly are rarely economically efficient. The cultural endowments they offer are costly; the forms of autonomy they defend stand in the way of marketization; the welfare services they organize generate no measurable profit. The groups will survive in any case, for they answer to profound human needs. But they won't prosper, expand, draw more people into everyday participation, help the excluded help themselves, unless there is a political decision on their behalf, unless the universal state enters into a social alliance with particularity and difference. Civil society—so we have been taught since Hegel—is a realm of fragmentation. But it also provides, or can provide with political assistance, the necessary conditions of liberty, equality, and solidarity. ●

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China in the American Imagination

Richard Madsen

The Tiananmen massacre of June 4, 1989, set off extraordinarily deep reverberations within American public opinion and led to strange movements within American politics. Tom Brokaw recalls that while he was doing a story on Los Angeles street gangs, the Crips wanted to ask *him* about what was going on in Tiananmen Square. After the massacre, Pat Buchanan ("Now we must choose—between the people of China and their now naked enemy, the Stalinist regime of Deng Xiaoping") made statements very similar to those of intellectuals who had been associated with the left-wing Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars ("We urge you not to forget the brave martyrs of Tiananmen . . . or to give succor to the perpetrators of the massacre"). And both right and left (joined temporarily by presidential candidate Bill Clinton) voiced anger over the efforts of the Bush administration to enter into dialogue with the "butchers of Beijing"—and criticized the business leaders who were all too eager to resume commercial relations with China. Like a seismic blast that produces anomalous data, the Tiananmen Square massacre revealed previously unnoticed cultural and social fissures under the surface of American public life.

Since 1989, the fissures have grown even wider. China policy has, for the first time since the seventies, become a hot, contentious, partisan issue. It arouses a lot of emotion, often over matters more symbolic than substantive. The public debate continues to produce strange alliances: Jesse Helms and Richard Gephardt advocate a confrontational China policy against the "constructive engagement" of Bill Clinton. Intellectuals on the left, in the late 1960s and the 1970s, often writing in the *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars,* emphasized the "great human gains of the Chinese revolution," praised Mao Tse-Tung as a revolutionary genius, and condemned the dictatorship of Taiwan's Chiang Kai-shek. Now, many of these same intellectuals champion Taiwan's emerging democracy against the tyranny of the Communist Party in mainland China. And sometimes they find common cause with erstwhile right-wing opponents who extolled Chiang Kai-shek as another Abraham Lincoln—while criticizing former colleagues for joining think tanks that emphasize business relations with China to the exclusion of the moral and political issues raised by the suppression of human rights. What is it about China that makes even the Crips interested in foreign affairs, while uniting Helms and Gephardt against Clinton and Bush and wreaking creative destruction within the ideological ranks of American intellectuals?

The answer has to do not just with China's economic and strategic importance but with its symbolic place in twentieth-century American intellectual history. In the first half of the century, China was one of the main fields for American Protestant missionary endeavor and, later, for secular philanthropies like the Rockefeller Foundation. In the 1930s and 1940s, Chiang Kai-shek, the leader of the Republic of China and a baptized Methodist, was effusively championed by Henry Luce, himself the son of China missionaries, and by his friends in the Eastern Establishment. At the same time, Mao's revolution became an object of fascination for the American left, influenced by the vivid reportage of journalists like Edgar Snow and Theodore White. Such antecedents have led Americans to see China in strongly moralistic terms. At the same time, it has been very difficult for even sophisticated Americans to gain a comprehensive understanding of

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China, not just because its language and culture are exotic, but, more important, because China is simply too big, diverse, and disorganized to sustain systematic generalizations. Because China is a big, important place that isn't well understood but evokes strong feelings, American discourse about China has long been as much about ourselves as about China.

Consciously or not, Americans have used China to construct and sustain important ideological myths about our own identity and place in the world. Such myths are usually fragile attempts to reconcile contradictory elements in our common aspirations, and they are vulnerable to being shattered by dramatic, unanticipated events like the Tiananmen massacre. What was the myth that was shattered by Tiananmen?

I HAVE ARGUED in my *China and the American Dream* that it was a myth that reconciled two contradictory versions of American identity—individualistic and communitarian. America has, on the one hand, long been seen as a land of individual opportunity—a place where entrepreneurial individuals can get rich. But it has also been seen as a national democratic community, whose members need to bear one another's burdens and to promote the sacred principles, especially respect for human rights, on which the nation was founded. It is difficult to make these visions compatible, especially in a society as divided along lines of class and race as this one, but the legitimacy of our institutions rests on a myth of compatibility. Under some social circumstances, the myth has seemed plausible. As long as the individual pursuit of profit seemed to be generating an expanding economy that benefited all members of their society, Americans did not have to worry too much about social responsibilities, and as long as their society could be imagined as relatively homogeneous, Americans could ground the relatively light burden of social responsibility on a thin layer of common pieties drawn from biblical religion and civic republicanism. But as Americans have become entangled with a global economy that leads to increasing levels of inequality and insecurity, and as they have been drawn into a global confluence of cultures and into rivalries with conflicting political systems, they have had a more difficult time reconciling their individualistic ambitions and community solidarities.

During the cold war, the Chinese revolution confronted Americans with a set of challenges to their national myth, challenges that led to bitter ideological polarization between right and left. The challenge was mainly ideological rather than economic or military. China was never threatening to American economic interests in Asia—it was too poor to provide much of a market for American products and (unlike the Soviet Union) too weak to threaten external expansion. But revolutionary China represented an affront to the democratic values that Americans liked to think were at the basis of their political community. Together with its Stalinist cousin, Maoist communism contradicted the assumption that American values were universal. A demonic Other (all the more demonic because of its Asian culture) that defied American ideals, it was the Red Menace of the McCarthy years. American intellectuals who showed the least bit of sympathy for China ran the risk of being stigmatized not merely as misinformed but as un-American. An irrational fear of Chinese communist expansion helped lead to the disastrous involvement in Vietnam.

In the mid-sixties, the New Left that mobilized around opposition to the Vietnam War embraced China as the "revolutionary redeemer society." Because China was closed off from communication with the West, the New Left knew even less about China than did the old right. New Left enthusiasm for China was largely a way of expressing disdain for the right. For the New Left, the Chinese revolution vividly exposed the hypocrisy involved in American professions of democratic values. These values had been celebrated by white people who enslaved Africans and killed Indians—and were now bombing Vietnamese. And in the twentieth century, they were maintained in spite of, and partially because of, segregation at home and imperialism abroad. "Like so many white groups in the anti-war movement," wrote Jim Peck, one of the founders of the Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars (CCAS), "we came to political awareness on

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the backs of the Vietnamese and the blacks. Without their success in beginning our liberation, CCAS would have little prospect of being anything else than an intellectual ornament. . . ."

From this point of view, China's Mao Tse-Tung was a hero of the world wide anti-imperialist movement and thus a champion of the dignity of oppressed people of color in the United States as well as in Asia. In Mao's China, leftist intellectuals saw a model of anti-imperialist participatory democracy—a more authentic representation of those values of democratic community that were at the core of American identity.

In the middle of the political spectrum were "an assorted group of scholars, bureaucrats, ministers, Congressmen, newsmen, ladies, and old China hands," as the *Nation* described the participants in a "National Conference on United States and China" that was held in 1965 and was one of the first efforts since the McCarthy era to develop a centrist national consensus about the need for a more flexible China policy. People in the center did not want to condemn or glorify China. They wanted to understand it better, to discuss it openly without being hounded by McCarthyites, and eventually to enter into dialogue with China's leaders with the goal of resuming trade relations and cultural exchanges with the Chinese people. They saw China less as an ideological threat than as a lost field of opportunities for American enterprise. China was a troubled modernizer, whose extremist revolutionary ideology would change, as long as China was open to trade and communication with America. Following the inevitable logic of modernization, China, in the view of scholars like Robert Scalipino, would become a society governed by "technical bureaucrats" who acted "pragmatically" rather than "ideologically." In other words, China's leaders would eventually become like our own. Openness to a world market economy would lead to the development of a democratic political community. Composed of business leaders, successful professionals, mid- to upper-level bureaucrats, the spokespersons for the center clung to the faith that American communitarian values were compatible with, and indeed grounded in, American commercial ambitions.

This faith had to be maintained in spite of China's extremely militant Cultural Revolution rhetoric. By the early 1970s, it seemed vindicated, however, by Richard Nixon's successful rapprochement with China, based on Henry Kissinger's geopolitical calculations. As Nixon and Kissinger portray it in their memoirs, this balance-of-power strategy was a hard-headed exercise in *realpolitik*. But it gained widespread legitimacy because it was perceived by many Americans—and perhaps deep down by Nixon and Kissinger themselves—not simply as clever geopolitics but as an exciting moral enterprise, breaking down walls of fear and ignorance: reconciliation with a great people that had, through misunderstandings, become estranged. In effecting a rapprochement with China, Nixon angered the American right, although he had done enough for them in the past to retain their loyalty; he temporarily dampened the critical voices of the left—after all he had shaken hands with their great revolutionary hero, Chairman Mao. But most of all he excited the American political center: he seemingly enacted the approach toward China that they had recommended and held out some hope for the triumph of the values they cherished.

In the late seventies and early eighties, the development of U.S. relations with China helped to sustain faith in the American myth at a time when it was being severely challenged by events at home—the loss of faith in American political institutions brought about by Vietnam and Watergate, increasing social conflict produced by income polarization, and the celebration of radical, opportunistic individualism during the Reagan years. Especially during the decade between the normalization of U.S.-China relations in 1979 and the Tiananmen massacre in 1989, it seemed that developments in China gave reason to believe that the myth was still sustainable. The Chinese government under Deng Xiaoping began to dismantle many of its socialist institutions, to create a market economy that celebrated individual entrepreneurship, and to open China to foreign commerce. China began to emerge as a potentially vast market for Ameri-

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can commodities—an exciting field of opportunities for enrichment. At the same time, many Chinese students and intellectuals began hungrily devouring books on Western political theory, and, in spite of government opposition, began calling for a democratization of their society and for protection of basic human rights. The evolution of China seemed proof to many in the United States that unleashing the power of free enterprise would lead inevitably to the creation of a democratic community, and thus to a vindication of the American faith. Viewed from across the American political spectrum, things seemed to be going so well with U.S.-China relations that the management of these relations was left to government experts.

Tiananmen smashed this comforting illusion, which was why the event so gripped the attention of the American public. Tiananmen dramatically demonstrated that the creation of a market economy did not inevitably bring democratic community. Even more scandalous to American ideology, the suppression of democratic aspirations in China seems—contrary to all predictions by American pundits in the wake of Tiananmen—to have helped China's economy to grow at a spectacular rate, by inhibiting the protests of workers and peasants over increasing insecurity and harsh working conditions.

While enabling some Americans to get rich, increasing trade with China also "helps" others to become poor, because China has a vast supply of cheap labor that competes with American labor. Economic engagement with China thus intensifies the class polarization that tears at the community fabric of the United States. At the same time, China's leaders, appealing to nationalistic impulses to legitimate their rule, take pride in defying American criticism of their treatment of dissidents and some religious believers, and challenging the universal validity of conventional American understandings of human rights.

Once again, China presents a challenge to the American myth that entrepreneurial individualism and democratic communitarianism can be reconciled. But the challenge is different than it was during the cold war. China is no longer communist in any meaningful ideological sense, but is a particularly rough-edged version of a more general East Asian development model. Last year, at a meeting in Beijing, a well-placed Party member who was defending child labor ("It's better that they go to work than not earn enough to live on") seemed bemused when I said that classical Marxists would object to his arguments. The main beneficiaries of China's present "socialist market economy" are tycoons and corrupt officials; its main opponents are state-sector workers and peasants. China's current pattern of economic development has almost nothing to do with socialism and everything to do with the growth strategy of the East Asian Newly Industrialized Countries (NICs), based on authoritarian governments (although there have been significant moves in both Taiwan and South Korea toward democratization), mercantilistic trade policies, export-oriented development, and a docile labor force. The main difference with the other East Asian NICs is that the Chinese repressive apparatus is harsher, more totalitarian, less accountable, and, ironically, less able to impart a coherent direction to China's vast, regionally divided population.

Although the assertive rise of this new China leads to emotional, polarizing debates, as it did during the cold war, the content of the debates and the political divisions among the protagonists are different. Faced with a rising China that challenges the key myth binding together disparate parts of the American ideology, American politics begins to coalesce into strange new alliances. The conventional three-part political spectrum gives way to a four-part configuration. In China policy, one can no longer talk of a left, right, and center. Now one must consider a division between a left and right establishment on the one hand and a left and right populism on the other.

The establishment, which is based in the interests of corporate and military elites and dominates the major think tanks and the staffs of the White House and State Department, consists of people who see the Chinese world from a classical individualist perspective: the American national interest is best served by expanding the opportunities of entrepreneurs

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to pursue their economic interests in a global market. As far as China is concerned, this means that American policy should be oriented toward expanding commercial ties with the People's Republic, even if that means neglecting human-rights issues. There are left and right versions of this establishment position (as well as an ambivalent center). The left sees the relationship in more cooperative terms. It wants to engage China with the freest possible trade. (A good example of this position would be found in the publications of the U.S.-China Business Council.) The right sees the relationship with China in more competitive terms. (A good example of this position is the recent book by Richard Bernstein and Ross Munro, *The Coming Conflict with China*.) Concerned about the proclivity of the Chinese to steal American technology or divert it to military purposes, the establishment right would use more of the U.S. government's muscle to confront or contain China in such a way as to protect American economic and political interests.

THE POPULIST position, which is based in the interests of workers and small-business owners and finds representation in Congress, human-rights organizations, and religious and secular advocacy groups, consists of people who see the Chinese world from a more communitarian perspective. They are concerned with preserving classic American values, respect for the rights of the individual above all. They tend to have a missionary attitude about their values, believing that they are universal and that their strength is best proven by getting people around the world to believe in them.

As far as China is concerned, this means that the United States should stop the Chinese government from maltreating political dissidents, and that American business executives should refuse to encourage the corruption that is endemic among Chinese officials today. Some of the populists would like the American government to do more to spread democracy in China through such methods as Radio Free Asia. Some wholeheartedly support the radio broadcasts and Bible smuggling operations of evangelical missionaries, and they want the United States government to do more to protect Chinese converts from persecution.

There are right-wing and left-wing (as well as more centrist) populists. The right, which is based especially in American evangelical churches, is more prone to denounce Chinese society as a whole for its corrupt, godless ways, and tends to see the necessity of a complete overthrow of the communist government. (Such thinking is reflected in the writings of A.M. Rosenthal of the *New York Times*, who draws information on the persecution of underground Christians in China from such sources as the Cardinal Kung Foundation and the Puebla Institute of Freedom House.) The left, which is based primarily in the American labor movement, is especially interested in promoting the rights of Chinese laborers, and advocates at least limited protectionism to defend American labor against competition from cheap, repressed Chinese labor. As long as the rights of labor can be sufficiently protected, however, it is willing to cooperate with China's government. (One of the most articulate spokespersons for this point of view is the philosopher Henry Rosemont, Jr. Perhaps because of the weakness of the labor movement, however, there are not many academic representatives of this point of view.)

These same divisions shape the debate over Taiwan. Populists on both left and right tend to see the island as a brave but resourceful David against a huge, bullying Goliath. Many leftist intellectuals from the sixties and seventies now admire Taiwan for the same reason they thought they admired Mao Tse-Tung—for championing the cause of the virtuous poor against the oppressive strong. (Just as the left noticed only a partial truth about Mao, so they see only a partial truth about Taiwan. Taiwanese businessmen going abroad in search of cheap labor run some of the harshest sweatshops in mainland China and Vietnam.) The left is more partial, though, toward the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), the party of the native Taiwanese, some of whose leaders spent decades as political prisoners under the rule of the Nationalist Party (KMT), until the end of martial law in 1987. The right, however, has long been enamored of the KMT. Meanwhile, the establishment worries that democratic pressures may push leaders in Tai-

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wan to do something provocative, such as declaring independence from the mainland, thus inciting military conflict in East Asia. If that were to happen, there would be debate among the left and right wings of the establishment about how vigorously the United States should help Taiwan defend itself from mainland assault. (Those advocating little to no help would probably prevail.)

LIKE DEBATES earlier in this century, these new debates about China and Taiwan are long on passion and short on facts. Maybe, as establishment thinkers predict, the spread of commercial ties with China will lead to the formation of a democratic polity. But there is no evidence that this is happening, at least in the short run. Political repression has actually increased during the expansion of commercial ties over the last five years. Maybe, as populist thinkers hope, enough Chinese will be attracted by Western versions of political freedom to make a smooth transition to a democratic polity, if they are given sufficient help and encouragement. But no one has enough evidence to predict confidently how and when this might happen.

What is most likely, in my view, is a division of China—probably de facto rather than officially—into different regions with distinctive styles of political economy and different trajectories of political development. As Chalmers Johnson once remarked, we might see "NIC China" with rapid economic growth leading to the emergence of a civil society in the coastal areas and especially the South; "Communist China" with a stagnant state-directed economy and a quasi-Stalinist political system in the north; and "Third World China" with widespread poverty, bitter ethnic strife, and a fragile but repressive government in the west. China, in short, is entering a new "spring and autumn" period (like the tumultuous transitional period that produced Confucianism together with a hundred other schools of contending thought), and—although one would hope that it would avoid a subsequent "warring states" period—one might expect that it will be a long time before China has any coherent lessons to teach us.

The debates stimulated by this multifaceted, ambiguous, "spring and autumn" China are once again debates mostly about ourselves. In a country whose economy is dominated by huge multinational corporations, how do we balance the benefits of global commerce with the need to ensure a decent livelihood for all our citizens? In a multicultural world, how do we avoid complete value relativism on the one hand and an arrogant insistence on our own cultural superiority on the other? How can we expand our horizons so as to enter into dialogue with other cultures about the meaning of a good life in an interdependent world? At the end of the twentieth century, the rise of a postsocialist China presses us to ask these questions in new ways. At the same time, China itself is too big, dynamic, and diverse to provide clear answers. So, as earlier in this century, we are thrown back on our own cultural and ideological resources and our own capacities for open conversation. Too often, in the past, the immensity and complexity of China has provoked both left and right to defensive closed-mindedness rather than to open dialogue. But now there are new dialogues taking place among a large number of diverse Americans and Chinese interacting within the fertile spaces on the edges of both societies: in Hong Kong, Shanghai, Taipei, and in multiethnic metropolises such as San Francisco and Los Angeles. This cultural ferment offers some hope for a new vision about how Chinese and Americans might create a common home in the intricately interdependent world of the twenty-first century. ●

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Tenure Trouble

Jon Wiener

WHY SHOULD college and university professors have job security, when so many other Americans are losing theirs? From *U.S. News & World Report* to the *Los Angeles Times* to the *Washington Post*, powerful voices are asking that question, and answering that tenure in academia has become obsolete. The academy, they argue, should submit to the logic of the market: because university managers need flexibility, because more cost-effective ways must be found to deliver educational resources (like replacing senior professors with new people who will work for less). Academic freedom—the justification for the tenure system—is not part of this reasoning.

Since there are black pundits who oppose civil rights and women who denounce feminism, it was inevitable that there would be a tenured professor who's against tenure. Richard P. Chait, who has tenure at Harvard (in the School of Education) is that professor. He's been quoted all over the place during the last year. He served as a paid consultant to the University of Minnesota regents in their recent unsuccessful attempt to abolish tenure—which led some to describe his occupation as "hired gun" and "hit man." Meanwhile, as professors at elite institutions are angrily debating Chait, college and university administrators everywhere are quietly hiring more and more temporary and part-time adjuncts, instructors, and lecturers who will never have a chance to earn tenure. The dirty little secret of the tenure system today is how many college teachers are denied its protections.

Chait's argument is simple. Professors say tenure is necessary to protect academic freedom; but if universities would simply *guarantee* academic freedom to professors, they wouldn't need tenure any more. Then university administrators and trustees and state legislators would be able to fire the undesirables, and professors wouldn't have any basis for objecting.

Unlike some critics of tenure, Chait recognizes that academic freedom needs protection. He knows that waves of political hysteria have intermittently crushed dissent and led to purges of university faculties, preventing the teaching of unpopular ideas. During World War I, professors who opposed the war on pacifist or socialist grounds were fired—one of them was Pete Seeger's father, fired from the University of California at Berkeley in 1917. After the war, administrators and faculty senates pledged to uphold freedom of speech and thought on campus, but thirty years later, when the McCarthy era began, universities again fired tenured professors who refused to sign loyalty oaths. Of course it won't happen again.

But academic freedom protects more than the expression of unpopular ideas. Most of what we take for granted in academic life derives from it, as Louis Menand writes in *The Future of Academic Freedom*: "from the practice of allowing departments to hire and fire their own members"—the chancellor can't just give his nephew a job in the economics department—"to the practice of not allowing the football coach to influence the quarterbacks' grade in math class."

The alternative to tenure that Chait has in mind is the limited-term contract, under which professors would be hired for three or five years, with no promise of renewal. Another alternative he recommends is "the chance to serve indefinitely as senior lecturers or clinical educators"—year-to-year appointments that could be renewed as long as the administrator in charge liked you or didn't prefer some-

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body else. Chait assures us that faculty members on limited-term contracts say that their work situations are "agreeable, collegial, and free from the pressures that the search for tenure—and its attainment—create." Yes, the pressure on assistant professors to publish and do the other things required for tenure is intense and can be oppressive. But those hoping for reappointment to a second limited-term contract also face pressures: they may need to say and do the things the boss likes, which can be more arbitrary and oppressive than the tenure review process.

The key to Chait's argument is the claim that academic freedom can be "guaranteed" in a way that makes tenure unnecessary for its protection. Here the crucial arguments have been made by another tenured professor, J. Peter Byrne of the Georgetown Law Center. He recommends that all faculty members be given contracts that include "a legally enforceable right to academic freedom and due process." Rights would be adjudicated by "a peer-dominated review panel" that would hear complaints; professors dissatisfied with their review panel's ruling could appeal to "an external panel of trusted academic experts."

When we think about the people academic freedom protects, usually we think of the lone faculty radical teaching Karl Marx—or lesbian literature—somewhere in the boondocks (although often the problems arise at places like UCLA, where the University of California regents tried not so long ago to fire Angela Davis). But other teachers also face threats: at the University of Minnesota, a decade ago, an agriculture school professor named Ed Schuh came out against farm subsidy payments at 90 percent of parity. Farm price supports are as sacred in the Midwest as the word of Joseph Smith at Mormon schools—so the citizenry was outraged, and the governor went to the university president and demanded that Schuh be fired. Schuh told me what happened: "The president told the governor, 'I can't fire Ed, he's got tenure.' "

"That's exactly the kind of thing tenure was designed to protect," Schuh said. "These kinds of things happen." He is now dean of the Hubert Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, former deputy undersecretary of agriculture, author or coauthor of six books and a hundred scholarly articles. "You need tenure not so much to protect individual faculty members, but to protect the integrity of the university," he said. "Society needs to know that I'm not forced to lie as a scientist or as a researcher in order to keep my job." It doesn't always work, he conceded; "even people who have tenure are not always willing to take on the powers that be. But without it, we're dead."

Recently, right-wing professors have been claiming they too need the protection of tenure in left-dominated universities. Thomas Reeves, a tenured historian at the University of Wisconsin at Parkside for twenty-five years, told me that his conservative views on homosexuality and affirmative action "can get you into trouble. Intolerant liberals dominate academia," he said. "Without tenure they would get rid of me."

Guarantees

How exactly would the "guarantee" of academic freedom protect someone like Ed Schuh or Thomas Reeves—if they had five-year contracts instead of tenure and at some point were not renewed? Each would exercise his right to appear before a review panel to state his belief that his teaching and research had been good, and that the reason he hadn't been renewed was his unpopular position—on farm price supports or homosexuals. The university lawyers would respond that the dean had many good reasons for not renewing these appointments. Delivery of educational resources in a free-market, high-tech society is undergoing dramatic changes. The university development plan calls for downsizing and cost cutting in traditional fields like agriculture and history, and investing resources instead in money-makers like management or careers in corrections (or, in southern California, screenwriting). Besides, the former professor's teaching wasn't that good—class enrollments hadn't been increasing at the required rate, and a couple of students complained that their grades were too low. And the former professor's research lacked sufficient distinction—his last book got some unenthusiastic reviews, and he publishes in

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journals read by very few people.

The bottom line, the university lawyers would argue, is budgetary: the new priorities of the institution as it faces the challenges of the twenty-first century mean that the professor's services are no longer required. Competent people can be hired at lower salaries. Besides, his contract explicitly said he had no right to be reappointed. Few petitioners are going to be able to refute arguments like these—especially when peer-review panels would consist of other faculty members with limited-term contracts instead of tenure, who themselves would have to worry about whether they would be reappointed if they displeased the administration.

And since college and university professors know this scenario, few would be willing to risk losing their jobs by writing or saying things that were controversial. Self-censorship would be the inevitable result of the end of tenure, more insidious and more damaging than the intermittent attempts of angry politicians or outraged parents or Republican regents to silence critical or dissenting voices. When this happens, Minnesota won't be troubled any more by professors challenging the conventional wisdom on agricultural price supports.

Those who dream of a world without tenure argue that nobody should have a guarantee of lifetime employment regardless of performance; they argue that tenure, in the words of the *Christian Science Monitor*, "protects the unproductive and insulates professors from pressure to update skills." At this point I must acknowledge that I am a professor with tenure—at the University of California. But tenured professors at the University of California, and most other universities, face reviews of their performance every two or three years; each must show evidence of excellence in teaching, research, and university service; those who don't are subject to demotion or other penalties. Even those who have reached the top of the salary ladder are still required to be reviewed every five years.

Opponents of tenure point to the problem professors, the ones who seldom come to class, or who come to class drunk, or who practice sexual harassment. Of course tenure should not protect them, and usually it doesn't. The basic principle of the tenure system is that professors can't be dismissed without good cause. Regular review and special disciplinary hearings can lead to demotion and termination in cases of incompetence, misconduct, or neglect of responsibilities. Nationwide, about fifty professors are fired each year, according to the American Association of University Professors (AAUP). In Texas, for example, during the last five years, the University of Texas, Texas A&M, and the University of Houston systems have fired eight tenured professors, three for poor performance. At the University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill, two tenured professors have recently been fired—a law professor after his second shoplifting incident in five years, and an English professor for having sex with students (he resigned before he was fired, which is what typically happens when charges of misconduct or incompetence are brought).

Opponents of tenure also point to the problem of deadwood. It's true that there are professors giving the same lecture today that they gave twenty-five years ago, who have failed to keep up with or have stopped caring about the literature in their fields. Periodic post-tenure review of teaching by peers ought to help here—although administrators are more likely to use periodic review to penalize those who don't increase enrollments rather than those who don't keep up with their fields.

Local Battles

Three years ago, Bennington College abolished tenure. The elite Vermont college brought in a new president, Elizabeth Coleman, who solved the school's financial problems by firing a third of the full-time faculty; she put the remaining faculty on one- to five-year contracts. (Bennington had a presumptive-tenure system—faculty members held five-year contracts with the understanding that they would be renewed until retirement.) Official Bennington spokespeople have recently declared that, among the faculty today, no one is complaining about the new system (is anyone surprised?), and that there is a "new sense of excitement" among the faculty who remain (excitement about who will be fired next, perhaps). But a group of fired faculty members sued the college in 1996, seeking $3.7 million

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in damages as well as full reinstatement. Meanwhile, Bennington is not attracting enough students to make it financially, according to Moody's Investors Service, which downgraded the school's bond rating to "B" after the faculty purge. Moody's warned the school that its "ongoing financial viability" required an entering class of around two hundred. The 1996–1997 entering class numbered only 120. Before the purge, total student enrollment was six hundred; last year it was half that.

No major university or college has followed the Bennington example. Minnesota might have been next: the University of Minnesota became the focus of the national debate on tenure when the regents proposed in the fall of 1996 to make it easier to lay off tenured faculty, cut their salaries, or discipline them for not maintaining a "proper attitude of industry and cooperation." The regents drafted their policy with the help of Richard Chait and a Washington law firm, Hogan and Hartson. That "proper attitude" clause more than anything else mobilized the Minnesota faculty—which consists of three thousand professors in more than two hundred departments, virtually all of whom went into revolt, opposed to the regents' proposals.

The struggle focused on the circumstances under which tenured professors could be fired. At Minnesota and many other institutions, professors have tenure only in their departments; if a department is abolished by the university administration, the tenured jobs there are abolished as well. The Minnesota regents wanted expanded powers, including the power to fire tenured people when "programs" were abolished. But many academic programs consist of only a few professors. Faculty feared that administrators could get rid of professors they regarded as troublemakers—or as too expensive—by abolishing the programs in which they taught, like medieval history or social psychology.

So the Minnesota academic senate fought the regents with surprising skill, and when the faculty came close to forming an AAUP union—which would have been a first at a major research university—the regents backed down. The tenure code approved in June by the faculty preserves tenure and provides for post-tenure review; faculty who repeatedly are found not to be performing satisfactorily can be dismissed; faculty have a right to a hearing if they receive a disciplinary reprimand; layoffs are permitted only if a financial emergency is declared; if programs are cut, tenured professors can't be fired if they accept reassignment.

The Minnesota victory "builds credibility with society that tenure is a very good thing," said university president Nils Hasselmo. "It is not a protection for poor performance, nor is it an obstacle to necessary change." Regents and administrators at other institutions no doubt learned the lesson of Minnesota: a mobilized faculty can successfully defend tenure in their institution. After Minnesota, opponents of tenure concede they will henceforth have to propose "less drastic measures." *U.S. News*, for example, declared that tenure could be "avoided" only at brand new institutions where it never existed—like Gulf Coast University in Fort Myers, which went into operation this fall, and offered most of its faculty multiyear contracts in place of tenure.

The Adjunct Problem

Although many believe with the *Washington Post* that tenure is a "reward that dates to the Middle Ages," in fact the tenure system as we know it is of very recent origin. In 1940, half of American colleges and universities were appointing faculty on one-year contracts. That year the AAUP and the American Association of Colleges together adopted for the first time a "Statement on Academic Freedom and Tenure," which set out the basis for the current system: after a probationary period of not more than seven years, all academics must be given job security or dismissed, and termination before retirement is permitted only in cases of demonstrated incompetence or misconduct. A system little more than fifty years old is hardly invulnerable to abolition—consider Aid to Families with Dependent Children, which lasted about sixty years, until Bill Clinton came along.

The greatest threat to the teaching of unpopular ideas today is not coming from frontal attacks on the tenure system from right-wing regents. The greatest threat comes from

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the inexorable trend toward staffing colleges and universities with part-timers, adjuncts, and instructors. Whereas virtually all four-year colleges and universities have tenure systems, today almost half the faculty at four-year colleges are part-timers. At two-year community colleges, part-timers make up 65 percent of the faculty. The stunning fact is that only about one quarter of America's 1.2 million college teachers have tenure. Even among full-time faculty who do not have tenure, only about 40 percent are eligible to apply, in comparison to 60 percent twenty years ago. These statistics (from the U.S. Department of Education and the AAUP) led the *New York Times* to conclude that tenure is "withering of its own accord." That's not quite right: tenure has been undermined by administrators who have adopted the logic of the market.

Schools can save a lot of money by replacing tenured professors with part-timers. The arithmetic is easy: a department with twenty tenured professors each earning $50,000, and each teaching two courses per semester, gives you eighty courses per year for $1 million. A department with one tenured professor (the chairman) paying part-timers $1,500 per course can give you eighty courses per year for about $170,000. Of course the part-timers don't get benefits, so they're even cheaper. It's like moving your factory to Mexico, except that your workers all speak English and have Ph.D.s, and you never even have to leave town.

There is one big difference: American colleges and universities can't be moved to Mexico and their workers have the right to organize and form unions. Collective bargaining seems like the best way to defend college teachers—at least at public colleges—against politically motivated firing—as the logic of the market, and the administrators who embrace it, undermine the freedom of teachers to teach. ●

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Is Judicial Review Good for the Left?

Mark Tushnet

Political scientist Peter Irons once wrote a book about people who took their constitutional claims to the Supreme Court. They included Mary Beth Tinker, who successfully challenged her school board's policy barring her from wearing a black armband to protest the war in Vietnam, and Barbara Elfbrandt, a Quaker teacher who refused to take an oath supporting the Constitution. Irons called his book *The Courage of Their Convictions*.

Recently the winners in important Supreme Court cases upholding First Amendment claims have been James Buckley, a former United States Senator now a federal court judge, the Colorado Republican Campaign Committee, and the First National Bank of Boston. Perhaps someone writing a book like Irons's today should call it *The Color of Their Money*.

Many liberals have warm and fuzzy feelings about judicial review. They hope that the Supreme Court will give them victories they cannot win in the political arena. Liberals with this view may think that the Supreme Court under Earl Warren—who left the Court in 1969—is the Supreme Court today. Or they may think that the Court's recent performance is a mixed bag, but still beneficial to liberals on balance. Or they may think that the Court's recent conservatism is a deviation from the Court's historic role.

None of those perceptions is accurate.

The Supreme Court is structured to keep it roughly in line with the dominant national political coalition (if there is one). It is buffered a bit against short-term swings in popular sentiment, and it is sometimes more responsive to elite views than to popular ones. But overall, what we get from the Supreme Court is pretty much what we get from politics generally.

The heartland of liberal affection for the Supreme Court is free speech law and the recollection of *Brown v. Board of Education*. Do liberals still occupy that heartland?

The Warren Court, during its peak years of 1963 to 1968, upheld free speech claims in about thirty cases. Almost all the cases involved classic free speech problems: political protestors, "subversive" activities, criticisms of government. Contrast that with the cases decided from 1989 to 1996. The Court again upheld about thirty free speech claims. Some of the cases involved traditional claims: a political pamphleteer who distributed a pamphlet anonymously, a woman who wanted to hang a flag protesting the Gulf War from her window. In probably the most famous case, the Court held unconstitutional laws banning flag-burning as a form of political protest. Margaret McIntyre, the pamphleteer, Margaret Gilleo, the protestor against the Gulf War, and Joey Johnson, the flag-burner, might someday appear in a new version of Irons's book. But then there are all the other cases. The Court now uses free speech to protect business interests—and not just media enterprises. Since 1976 the Court has developed an extensive set of rules that severely limit our ability to regulate campaign financing.

The Political Tilt of Free Speech Law

In the 1960s free speech protection tilted fairly strongly to benefit liberals and critics of the government. Today that tilt is not nearly as strong. And, if commercial advertising and campaign finance cases deal with issues with greater social impact than the distribution of anonymous pamphlets, free speech protection tilts somewhat—not strongly, but somewhat—to the right, aiding people who are already

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pretty well fixed for political and economic power.

Many people think we need courts to protect free speech because the Mary Beth Tinkers and Barbara Elfbrandts are not able to protect themselves. Somehow, though, that no longer seems quite right. Margaret McIntyre might be in trouble if she had to depend on the good will of the state legislature, but surely not the Republican Party.

Why do liberals still celebrate the First Amendment when it benefits their political opponents? Typically they like to use government power to ameliorate the effects of economic power on the distribution of food and housing. Why shouldn't they be willing to use government power to ameliorate the effects of economic power on the distribution of ideas?*

Most liberal defenders of free speech defend it because they think that free speech protections help liberals. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) member can say, "We know that a lot of free speech law today gets in the way of the liberal political causes we also favor. But we have to be vigilant in protecting free speech principles. If we let them erode in connection with campaign finance regulation, there's a risk that the revised principles will be applied to core political speech. If we treat campaign finance as something the government can regulate to equalize contending voices in the society, we might end up with a government that was able to restrict the use of public spaces, streets and parks, again purportedly to promote equality."

This argument depends on the way the Court generalizes its protection of free speech for the powerful. Suppose the Court protects free speech because its members have libertarian views and oppose government regulation of anything. The ACLU argument is that we have to defend free speech for businesses to make sure that it will be available to political protestors. But a libertarian court is going to generalize differently: instead of saying "Protect free speech here, there, and everywhere," the libertarian court will say, "Keep the government out of here, there, and everywhere." Liberals cannot like that idea.

On race discrimination law, it is enough to note that Brown no longer is the central case dealing with race. Now the Court's anti–affirmative action decisions are central.

*Not all who call themselves liberals today are reluctant to use the government's power in this way.

The Supreme Court and Election Returns

What can we say about judicial review in more general terms? The limitations of judicial review were given their classic expression by the journalist and humorist Finley Peter Dunne. Dunne had his alter ego, Mr. Dooley, comment on a controversy over whether U.S. forces occupying Puerto Rico and the Philippines in the 1890s had to comply with the Constitution. As the question was put at the time, Did the Constitution follow the flag? After the Supreme Court decided that only a few constitutional limitations applied, Mr. Dooley said, "No matter whether the Constitution follows the flag or not, the Supreme Court follows the election returns."

A half-century later, political scientist Robert Dahl examined the Court's record more systematically, and came to roughly the same conclusion. According to Dahl, the Supreme Court never holds out for an extended period against a sustained national political majority. And not infrequently, it succumbs to short-term pressures that have led to some of our most distressing constitutional episodes. The Court upheld the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II, and its overall performance in the McCarthy era, though illuminated by a few bright spots, was generally dim. Later studies have qualified Dahl's conclusions by stressing the importance of the words *extended*, *sustained*, and *national*. But with those qualifications Dahl's conclusion remains accurate.

No one should be surprised that the Supreme Court follows election returns. Political scientist Martin Shapiro points out that courts everywhere are parts of national political systems. A political system with one part consistently at odds with other parts, he argues, would be a system routinely in crisis. In stable political systems, the courts and the other national political organs will be in rough correspondence most of the time.

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The U.S. Supreme Court is likely to fit in with the national political majority, with something of a time lag, particularly when that majority sustains itself over an extended period. By the 1960s the New Deal political coalition had controlled national politics for so long that the Supreme Court's justices were simply another part of that coalition. The time lags built into the Court's structure extended the Warren Court era into the 1970s. By the 1990s the transformation of American politics that began with Richard Nixon's presidency produced a Supreme Court whose moderate centrism corresponded almost precisely to the national center of political gravity.

What the Court Does

Judicial review is often the last resort of a social and political movement that lacks political power. People rarely go to court unless they are pessimistic about what they can accomplish through political action. Judicial review *must* help these people—or so liberals think.

But remember that the Court follows the election returns. *Brown v. Board of Education* stands as a powerful objection to critics of judicial review: the Court appears to have accomplished something that neither Congress nor the president could have, constrained as they were by politics. A closer look at what the Court actually does should qualify liberal enthusiasm. Judicial review is not meaningless, but the differences it makes are rather small.

- *Dealing with "outliers."* The Court in *Griswold v. Connecticut* (1965) found that Connecticut's ban on using contraceptives infringed on a constitutionally protected right to privacy. But *Griswold* is hardly an example of the Supreme Court acting against the will of the people of the United States. When it was decided, only two states banned the use of contraceptives.

The Supreme Court often acts for a national political majority that has not yet worked its will through legislation by invalidating statutes well out of the national mainstream. Does judicial review help in dealing with these problems? In a slightly different context, Justice Robert Jackson wrote that the aberrations "are individually too petty, too diversified, and too local to get the attention of a Congress hard pressed with more urgent matters." A Court that eliminates them plays an interesting political role but, precisely because the laws are "petty," hardly a major one.

The relation between *Griswold* and the abortion cases suggests, however, that decisions wiping aberrational laws off the books may have broader effects. The Supreme Court, after all, has to explain why an unusual regulation is unconstitutional. In doing so it articulates a legal doctrine that has effects as a precedent—at least if a later court decides to treat it as a precedent. But that depends as much on the election returns as on the initial decision itself.

- *Dealing with regional majorities*: *Brown* is more interesting. There the Court may have acted against a regional majority at odds with national political elites. By 1954 segregation was an embarrassment to elites concerned with how the United States looked to the rest of the world. Supporters of the Soviet Union pointed to southern apartheid to demonstrate that the "really democratic" Soviet system was superior to the fake democracy in the United States. Eliminating segregation would advance the national interest by combating these arguments. But Congress could not act. It was organized on the basis of seniority, which meant that long-serving members from the one-party South could block antidiscrimination legislation.

The Court's decision in *Brown* is best understood as enforcing the national elite's view against a regionally dominant position that had excessive power in Congress. True, the national elite was divided, and some—including President Dwight Eisenhower—were only lukewarm about desegregation. As law professor Derrick Bell has pointed out, the Court typically has acted to benefit African-Americans only when African-American interests converged with the interests of whites. *Brown* is a good example: The Court acted to support one side in a national debate, seeing correctly that the advocates of desegregation were right not only about the immorality of segregation but also, and in Bell's view more important, about the interests of white Americans.

By 1970 the political obstacles to enacting federal antidiscrimination laws had essen-

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tially disappeared. African-Americans were an important political force in the national Democratic Party and influenced national policy. A defender of judicial review might attribute these political changes to *Brown*. African-Americans gained political power, according to this defense, because they had won their constitutional case in *Brown*. The unanswerable question is whether political change would have occurred without *Brown*. It seems quite likely that something would have happened anyway. African-Americans were increasingly unwilling to accept Southern apartheid, and some sort of civil rights movement was probably inevitable. And their steady migration to the North made their votes more important to the national political parties. No matter how one comes out in the end, it seems reasonably clear that *Brown* is not a strong demonstration of how the Court can bring about change on behalf of those who lack political power.

• *Acting for a national political majority*. The abortion cases show the Supreme Court acting on behalf of a latent national political majority even though the 1973 decisions invalidated abortion laws throughout the nation. By the early 1970s states had begun to adopt modern abortion laws, allowing abortions to protect the woman's life or health. But abortion-rights advocates were increasingly disillusioned with their experience under these reform laws, which, they believed, set up an obstacle course that only middle-class women could get through. Their political agenda shifted to repealing all anti-abortion laws. Simultaneously, abortion-rights opponents began to mobilize against both reform and repeal. With the nation divided over abortion, the Court came down in favor of more extensive reform.

The Court's abortion decisions were made by the supposedly conservative Burger Court. The supposedly more conservative Rehnquist Court modified the decisions but expressly reaffirmed the "core holding" of *Roe v. Wade*. How could this happen? Here's the explanation. The Warren Court responded to the interests of the New Deal coalition, but by the early 1970s that coalition began to fracture into interest groups competing with each other for shares of a no-longer-expanding economic pie. Republican leaders exploited these emerging divisions. The political outcome was a shift in the presidency from Democratic to Republican control. Republican presidents appointed relatively conservative justices to the Court. The disintegration of the New Deal coalition freed up political space, but during Burger's tenure—and perhaps to the present—no alternative appeared on the scene. That gave the Court an opportunity to develop its own constituency of support.

WOMEN BECAME such a constituency. Democrats simply had to accommodate women's interests in the general pluralist bargaining that characterized the Great Society. During Burger's tenure, Republicans as a party were divided over the claims asserted by the organized women's movement. But there were enough Republicans on the Supreme Court responsive to those claims to make it relatively easy for the Court as a whole to develop women as a constituency of support. They were "country club" Republicans who accepted the basic contours of the New Deal and the welfare state, were concerned about the fiscal consequences of New Deal policies, and, notably, could identify the claims made by the organized women's movement with their own class interests.

Country club Republicanism accounts for the pattern of the Court's decisions in abortion cases. The Court's decisions made it possible for middle-class women accustomed to navigating their way through complex regulatory schemes to obtain abortions when they wished. They also allowed states to make it more difficult for less well-off women to do so, most dramatically by accepting the legality of state bans on public funding for abortion.

Once again we can understand the Court's decisions in Mr. Dooley's terms: the Court was following the election returns, although the election returns in the 1970s and 1980s were sufficiently unclear that the judges had some space to pursue their own political agenda. It thus seems appropriate that the major *constitutional* victory for women in the 1990s has been a decision finding unconstitutional sex-segregated public education at Virginia Mili-

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tary Institute, one of only two such institutions that remained operating.*

• *Acting for national politicians.* Political scientist Mark Graber has identified another way the courts respond to national politics—or, more precisely, to national politicians. Sometimes national politicians notice a "no-win" issue: no matter what position they take on the issue, they will lose politically. Sometimes they use the courts to test the political waters. Some politicians will climb aboard the courts' bandwagon to get the support of people who agree with the courts' decisions, and others can attack the courts for taking the issue away from the people who wanted some other outcome.

Graber argues that the abortion decisions resulted from legislative deferral of decision to the courts: politicians "encouraged judicial resolution of an issue that threatened existing partisan alignments," splitting traditional country-club Republicans from newer social-issue Republicans, and dividing elite Democrats from their traditional working-class, Catholic, and union allies.

• *Predicting the future.* Law professor Alexander Bickel was a critic of the Warren Court's aggressive judicial liberalism. He was puzzled by the fact that the Court seemed to be getting away with its decisions. Even ones that were unpopular when made rapidly settled into public consciousness as permanent fixtures in our constitutional scheme. The Court, Bickel said, sometimes took on the task of predicting the future. The Warren Court's successful decisions rested on good predictions; the Court noticed an emerging trend, and then endorsed it. The Court's decisions might accelerate the pace of change a bit. But, according to Bickel, its successes lay in guessing right about a future that was going to happen no matter what the Court did.

Bickel's argument explains the decision in *Romer v. Evans* (1996), which held unconstitutional a Colorado provision barring the state or any city from banning discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. *Romer* was not a decision outside the mainstream. National public-opinion surveys showed high levels of support for the proposition that employers should not discriminate against gays and lesbians. Within a few months of the Court's decision, a Republican-controlled Senate came within one vote of adopting the Employment Nondiscrimination Act to bar such discrimination. The Court guessed where the country was going, and got in front.

Justice Antonin Scalia's dissent in *Romer* excoriated the majority for enacting the views of a cultural elite. The justices *are* members of a cultural elite, and they are likely to see the future moving in the direction the elite wants. And yet, one thing that gives a cultural elite its status is precisely the power to shape the future. The Court could do worse than follow the views of cultural elites if it wants to predict the future.

Of course the Court does not have a perfect crystal ball. A decade before *Romer v. Evans*, the Court upheld state laws making homosexual sodomy a crime (*Bowers v. Hardwick*, 1986). The decision was badly received among elites at the time. The future had arrived by 1996, and the Court was so embarrassed by its earlier decision that its opinion in *Romer* simply did not mention *Bowers*.

• *Acting against a real national majority? Brown* is important in another way. Whatever its effects were, we know that it did not transform the material conditions in which most African-Americans live. African-American participation in the national political process has not eliminated discrimination or the disproportionate poverty affecting the African-American community. The reason is that a national majority believes that such policies would be too expensive. The point to note here is that judicial review has not addressed these problems either. Again following the election returns, the Supreme Court has shifted gears. It now uses the rules it developed to assist African-Americans to strike down affirmative-action programs.

• *Keeping "rights" on the agenda.* Of course every time the Court upholds a constitutional claim it reinforces the idea that concern for fundamental rights ought to be an important

*The Supreme Court has been reasonably active in support of women's claims, but most of them have been statutory claims, once again showing that women, like African-Americans, have become significant participants in ordinary politics.

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part of our political discourse. It seems to me barely possible that letting the courts reinforce that idea is generally a good thing for liberals, even when the rights the courts actually implement are not ones liberals like. Yet there's something to the neoliberal idea that, as Mary Ann Glendon puts it, we have too much "rights talk" going around. The hypertrophy of rights talk may actually diminish our attachment to those fundamental rights to which liberals are truly attached. And it's worth noting that people on the left elsewhere in the world have been able to articulate an agenda of advancing fundamental rights, including rights that aren't important parts of the U.S. Constitution, without becoming acolytes of judicial review.

WHY DO liberals still seem to like the Court? Its strength in elite circles results from savvy constituency building. In recent years it's given just enough to about every interest group to keep nearly everyone satisfied with judicial review: women (*VMI*), gays (*Romer*), businesses (property rights cases), the major parties (campaign finance decisions). Just about the only significant interest group to which the Court has consistently given the back of its hand in the 1990s is African-Americans.

The Court's recent history belies the claim that judicial review makes a big difference in defense of liberal political positions. The Court's actions fall into two broad classes. Sometimes it has acted against those who persisted in policies that a strong national majority rejected. And sometimes it chose sides when the nation was closely divided. Such choices can have important and good consequences when the Court chooses the right side, as it did in *Brown*. But nothing guarantees that the Court will always do so. We probably can't tell whether judicial review benefits progressive and liberal causes more than it harms them because judicial review doesn't make enough difference to matter.

Looking at judicial review over the course of U.S. history, we see that the courts have regularly been more or less in line with what the dominant national political coalition wants. Sometimes the courts deviate a bit, occasionally leading to better political outcomes and occasionally leading to worse ones. Adapting a metaphor from electrical engineering, we can say that judicial review basically amounts to noise around zero. It offers essentially random changes, sometimes good and sometimes bad, to what the political system produces.

Things would be different, of course, if we had better judges. But we'll get better judges only if we have better politics. And if we have better politics, we might not need better judges after all. ●

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THE EDITORS

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Berlin Mitte

Nicholas Howe

THE TRAVELER'S great temptation is to fix a place with a phrase and then be done with it. Sometimes, despite all the possibilities for error, a phrase does work: Florence lives in its stones, as Mary McCarthy saw; Paris remains the capital of the nineteenth century, as Walter Benjamin knew. Offering such a phrase for Berlin, though, seems riskier because what happened there happened so much more recently. It is a place where history is not yet history, or, more exactly, where the past has a way of returning just when it seemed safe to file it away as dead and gone.

When Berliners asked me last summer, usually with some apprehension, how I liked the city, they would immediately understand my response that "like" was not the word for the place. But that easy point made, one still needed to talk about the city. At such moments, I fell into a phrase that seemed to satisfy Berliners and that allowed me to evade the force of their question. I would say that Berlin was history interrupted by construction. And if I said this in Mitte, the center of the city, there was a quick nod of recognition, for everywhere on its streets you stumble over construction and reconstruction, you feel the vibration of heavy equipment, you hear the Arabic, Polish, and English spoken by workers on scaffolds. As you walk through Mitte, your shoes pick up a thin coat of dust from its building sites. Here, construction-watching has been made into an art form: from the elevated "Red Box" overlooking Potsdamer Platz, where once there was only the "death strip," you can gaze out at what is called—in the inevitable formula, whether English or German—"the largest construction site in the world." Here the cranes have been, quite literally, choreographed to perform a ballet of mechanical movement as public performance.

For all that Berlin is a spectacle, you realize after a time that the money and energy thrown into constructing and reconstructing the city are no more than an interruption. After the equipment and workers are gone, the corporate headquarters are finished, and the art deco buildings refurbished, memories of all that happened here will still remain. The Wall is gone, but its path will be marked out again in a few years by a run of new construction from Checkpoint Charlie to Potsdamer Platz to the River Spree. The buildings of the late 1990s will divide the reunified Berlin of the future as surely as the city was divided from 1961 to 1989 by the Wall. For all their postmodern glamour, the corporate palaces of Sony, Daimler-Benz, and others will mark the map of Berlin as scar tissue. The wound may close, but its trace will remain. In the meantime, it's necessary to buy, through building and rebuilding, time away from all the questions that haunt one about the city.

These notes about Berlin come from a month spent at Humboldt University in what was the eastern sector of the city. During June 1997 I taught courses in medieval studies to graduate students, all of whom were in their mid-twenties or older. Their age matters because they were on the verge of adulthood when the *Wende* occurred in 1989, and it affected them profoundly because they were all raised in East Germany. In the shifting vernacular of the place, they were born Ossis.

My sense of Berlin comes largely from conversations with these students, conversations that were all the more charged because they occurred at a university in the center of Mitte. To talk with students about the writing of history there was not a routine academic exercise. When we left the building on Unter den

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Linden where class met, we could walk west toward the Brandenburg Gate and the Reichstag, or east toward the Palace of the Republic, built by the communist government on the site of the old imperial palace. Near where we got coffee between classes was the square where in 1933 students burned books by Jews and other dangerous authors. Across Unter den Linden was the Neue Wache, the New Watch, a Prussian guardhouse that has been made into a memorial for all the suffering and death brought into the world by Germany during the twentieth century.

Reading scholars whose lives and works had been twisted by the Germany of the 1930s and 1940s meant moving beyond the ostensible subject of medieval studies. To discuss Erich Auerbach, forced into exile by the Nazis in 1935; or E.R. Curtius, who spent the war as an internal emigré writing a visionary encyclopedia of medieval literature; or Marc Bloch, who led the Resistance in Lyons and was executed by the Gestapo in 1944—these discussions led to questions about the relations between a scholar's life and the writing of history. And these questions had everything to do with the place where they were asked. As the narrator of Christa Wolf's story "Unter den Linden" says, "I had always suspected that this street leads into unknown depths."

Construction/Reconstruction

Walking on Friedrichstrasse from Unter den Linden to the train station, a distance of three or four blocks, means weaving back and forth from one sidewalk to the other to avoid building sites. You make progress, but not in a straightforward way. Each day, it seems, the barriers have been shifted slightly, so today's route is not the same as yesterday's, nor will it be the same as tomorrow's.

These subtle shifts in daily route force shifts in the way you look at the same site. Crossing at midstreet instead of at a corner means looking at the flow of buildings in ways not possible the day before. Changes in the urban landscape appear: as one building comes down, the view of another opens and what was hidden emerges, though it may soon disappear from view as a new building appears. The history of the city gets played out in its architectural styles. Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century buildings that survived the bombing are being restored, and new glass boxes are being erected in the open spaces. From a bench on Unter den Linden you can watch a steady flow of flatbed trucks loaded with plasterboard, dump trucks filled with torn-up masonry or paving, and cement mixers churning away. The sign on one truck could serve as a motto of this new Berlin: *für Bau und Aufbau* (for construction and reconstruction). When you look up from street level, the horizon line is filled with construction cranes swinging their loads. From one spot on the edge of Potsdamer Platz I counted twenty-nine cranes before the light turned green and I moved on.

There are disconcerting, even shocking juxtapositions in Mitte between the most elegant art deco hotel covered with sexy nymphs in stone and the shabbiest, poured concrete, pre-fab building left over from the German Democratic Republic (GDR), one of the ubiquitous *Plattenbauten*. It would be hard, if you did not know the narrative of Berlin, to comprehend how it happened that such buildings came to stand next to each other. For how could any one place have such impossibly different senses of how to build and thus of how to live?

Perhaps the most troubling site of construction and reconstruction in Mitte is the Palace of the Republic, which sits on the far end of Unter den Linden from the Brandenburg Gate. Occupying the site of what had been the imperial palace until it was razed because of World War II bomb damage, the Palace of the Republic today stands empty and abandoned because it is poisoned with asbestos. Surrounded by a chain-link fence, it is enormous, evocative, too eloquent a relic from the communist era to be treated merely as a building. And so, overcharged with symbolism, it remains while Berliners argue about whether it should be torn down—because it is ugly and contaminated and thus a reminder of the communist past—or be restored—because it was a place where people enjoyed themselves at restaurants and bowling alleys and thus a reminder of the communist past. Or, and this is no cheap paradox, that it should be preserved

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for exactly the reasons some would tear it down, or torn down for exactly the reasons some would preserve it.

Today, the bronze mirror-glass facade of the palace reflects little except the tour buses parked in what was once Marx-Engels Place. They pile in there, their drivers happy to escape the snarl of Berlin traffic. Wisecracks about the locomotive of history being replaced by tour buses forever parked in front of the abandoned Palace of the Republic are easy, almost too easy, to make. More eloquent was the scene I witnessed one afternoon of a group of ten-year-olds on an excursion with their teachers. As they walked the length of the building, almost two hundred meters along the fence, not one of them stopped to look up at the Palace. Even ten years ago that would have been a destination for their school trip; now it's only the edge of a dusty square filled with buses, piles of building material, Dumpsters.

At certain sites, this process of rebuilding seeks some architectural and thus political adjustment between old and new. The Deutsche Bank on the corner of Unter den Linden and Charlottenstrasse has been impeccably restored to its pre-World War II condition; its immaculate stonework and polished metal proclaim it to be the headquarters of a long-established concern, though one absent from the neighborhood for some time due to unavoidable circumstances. But it's back now, and the parade of black Mercedes-Benzes is there in front to assure us that important business is being conducted within. To complete the restoration, a wall of plate glass has been erected across the facade of the bank's upper four stories. The effect is striking because the glass seals the building off from the city as if it were on display behind a museum case. This glass suggests a desire to ward off the workings of time and history, to exist hermetically apart from the grime and pollution that fill the Berlin air, once famously pure and now redolent with complicated odors. Looking at that wall—no less impermeable for being transparent—reminds you that banks are well practiced in the art of historical accommodation.

Throughout Mitte the air smells of partially burned diesel fuel from the rumble of construction equipment and heavy trucks; its scent mixes strangely well with the occasional whiff of human waste that comes up from the sewers. That odor, Berliners joke, lets even the blind know where they are on the old map of the city: east or west.

Looking at Berlin

In Berlin, a scene will arrange itself with such metaphorical, even allegorical, brilliance that you wonder if there is any literal being or meaning to the place. Take something as common as this: the east side of the German Historical Museum, once the old Prussian Arsenal completed in 1730, is covered with scaffolding and plastic sheeting as it undergoes renovation. In this, it is no different from hundreds of other buildings in Mitte. All is veiled of the building's side, yet from above the sheeting appear statues of historical and mythical figures. It is, on the face of it, no more than stonework being repaired. But the eye cannot avoid reading it as a scene about the workings of history in this part of the world. No covering completely hides the past, some trace escapes, and is all the more revealing for being incomplete. To use the title of Brian Ladd's thoughtful book, one can speak of "the ghosts of Berlin," but they do not haunt with a wraith-like mystery.

The danger of looking at Berlin is captured nastily by the joke Berliners tell of the American tourist, the one who wanted to know why Hitler built the Reichstag so close to the Wall. It can be very hard to construct a stable chronology for a city in which buildings and monuments remain unchanged as physical structures but acquire with each change of government new symbolic purposes.

The plan, after the Bolsheviks came to power in Russia, was to make Berlin the capital of the permanent revolution. It never happened. Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg were murdered in 1919. Then came the Weimar Republic, Hitler, the GDR. Enough to make one think at times that Berlin has been the capital of the twentieth century. Yet even here, on Walter Benjamin's home ground, it won't work to follow his gesture of choosing a city as capital of a century. And Berlin is certainly not the Paris of the last century, the *flâneur*'s paradise. For a foreigner, it's not easy

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to maintain that ironic detachment. Every site impinges, every attempt to look away from one site brings you face to face with another. If Berlin marks anything in our time, it is as one of the places where the hopes of the twentieth century went to die. And how do you build a monument for that?

Medieval History

When I told my students that Marc Bloch was considered by some American scholars to be a Marxist historian because he related feudal society and its social institutions to the agricultural means of production, they laughed. Having been educated in East Germany, they all knew by rote a Marxist historiography in service to the party line. They understood that Bloch's subtle explorations into the relationship, for example, between the boredom of the knightly classes and the development of chivalric romance as a genre shared nothing with the grand schemes of history they had been taught. About this, they were articulate and shrewd. When I talked about the historiography that Bloch rejected in the 1920s—that of kings and wars, of history as one great event after another—they seemed somewhat puzzled. For that sense of history was familiar to them only through the caricature of capitalist thinking they had learned before the *Wende*.

That reading medieval history might have some direct political value broke through at the very end of the term when a student, her eyes blurred with tears, spoke about what it meant to read Marc Bloch and E.R. Curtius, Georges Duby and Jacques Le Goff. From them, she said, she learned that history was more than a slave uprising led by Spartacus, or peasant revolts during the Middle Ages, or the failed movements of 1848: that history could be something more complex, less eschatological, than a rehearsal for the Russian Revolution. What she had been denied as a student, she said simply, was the past. And of the medievalists we read, it was Curtius she cited because he had withdrawn during the Nazi years to write his *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, a massive study that argued that the unitary nature of European civilization derived from a commonly-held classical and medieval tradition. It was a tradition, he argued, that had shaped alike all of the Western European nations fighting each other in the 1940s. Curtius's book stands as an implicit polemic against any claim of German exceptionalism. This student's praise for Curtius drew, I suspect, on her memories of people who, in the GDR, had kept alive senses of the past other than those that had been officially prescribed. For like Curtius, such people would have struggled to articulate some continuity between past and present that was not a grossly ideological construct.

During these discussions, I felt the sheer amount of work these students had done since 1989 to understand first what had happened during the GDR, and then what had happened in Germany during the Nazi period. For the collapse of the communist regime meant the end of the party line that those who had become West Germans were all originally Nazis, while those who had become East Germans had always been heroes of the antifascist resistance. These students had to discover layers upon layers of distortions and untruths. At times it was almost unbearably painful to listen to them as they worked through these layers. When I said, with some hesitation, that Bloch had been executed by the Gestapo because he was active in the Resistance, they grew silent and uncomfortable. They did not speak after I told them this but wanted to know more about Bloch's life and death. Their silence was not the silence of denial, as it might have been for an older generation. It was the silence that comes from a sense of not knowing enough, of trying to learn more, of needing to understand before speaking. It was a form of tact.

Thinking back on these class discussions, I realize that the students could only say so much about what they had experienced in the past and were learning in the present. They needed time, above all, to think through what they were encountering both inside and outside the university. They had experienced too many shocks of recognition in the past eight years or so to speak without long reflection. And yet they showed remarkable resiliency. Perhaps it helped that we were talking about medieval culture rather than twentieth-cen-

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tury history, perhaps it helped that I was American and not West German. Perhaps it helped that I told them my father was Jewish. And perhaps it helped that we spoke in English and not German. For these all gave us ways to think obliquely about what it meant to be meeting as a class four stories above Unter den Linden in June of 1997. That is, of thinking about what it meant to do something that even ten years ago none of us would have thought possible in the course of our lives.

Intact Ruins

Amid the renovation and construction in Mitte, there are continual reminders of the shabbiness that the GDR had become by the late eighties: platforms in train stations crumbling away, tiles falling off building facades on the former Stalin Allee, decorative stonework of the early twentieth century eaten away by pollution. Driving through Pankow or elsewhere in the old East Berlin, you see bright storefronts at street level with all sorts of attractive things in the window. And then you look up to the higher floors, which are soot-blackened from the soft coal used for heating. A long accumulation of grit, a lack of materials and money to keep things in repair hang heavily over these neighborhoods. A few buildings have been repainted, fitted out with new windows, and the difference is startling, in part because these simple improvements make you ask why it had been necessary for people to live in that grayness, that absence of color and light.

Another visible reminder of life before the *Wende* is the Trabant, the East German car people waited years to buy new and, in fact, paid more for used so they could get one sooner. Plastic-bodied, powered by a two-stoke engine that belched pollution from the oil and gas mixture it burned, ugly beyond words. Today a Trabant parked in a street beside a modest Volkswagen seems a relic from a time when people heard rumors from elsewhere about things called cars. And from these rumors they cobbled together the Trabant. Crossing traffic in Jena, I turned to a friend and said, "However I go, I don't want to be hit by a Trabant." To which he replied, "Not to worry. It would get the worst of any collision."

Nothing in Berlin approaches the desolation one sees from the train as it passes through the old industrial centers of East Germany, such as Leipzig and Bitterfeld. In the aptly named Bitterfeld, once the center of the chemical industry, the factories are empty: windows are blown out, bushes grow through the roofs, the endless pipelines from building to building sag under their own weight. The view speaks of apocalypse but not of any sudden sort; this desolation comes not from fire, earthquake, bombing, but from long neglect and final abandonment. Weeds grow in parking lots, strips of paint hang from buildings, the odd piece of rolling stock sits rusting on a railway siding. The leukemia rates here are said to be among the highest in the world.

The signs of desolation in Mitte are far more subtle than those in Bitterfeld, such as the pockmarks left behind by bullets and shrapnel fragments. Even meticulously renovated buildings show some of these traces in their stonework if you look carefully enough. More picturesque is the ruined edge of the Museum of Natural History: a bombed-out shell from World War II that sprouts grass from its walls and trees from what remains of its roof. It looks like nothing so much as a medieval ruin lovingly tended by caretakers. Students at the nearby agricultural school of Humboldt University want it kept in its current state. And it does add a certain charm to the place. As a professor there remarked, with the irony characteristic of the city, it is "the only intact ruin left in Berlin."

THIS PHRASE captures the particular moment of Berlin in 1997, but it also set me to thinking about the fact that the great museum of Berlin, the Pergamon, has been from the start a collection of intact ruins lifted from various places in the ancient world. This is not the usual collection of antiquities displayed in cases and halls of sculpture. Here you can see in reassembled form the massive Greek altar from Pergamon in Turkey and the Ishtar Gate from Babylon. Whatever questions of national heritage these ruins raise with respect to their places of origin, they are by now very much a part of twentieth-century Berlin. The history of ruins is a

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kind of secondary display here, and is the subject of several murals located in the far reaches of the museum away from the heavy tourist traffic.

These murals, dated and signed *-19-EA-36-*, can be found in rooms filled with antiquities excavated from Syria. They depict the sites in idealized form, that is, as ruins that have yet to be dug. A few animals and natives in vaguely appropriate costumes appear in each scene, but the emphasis is on the tumulus, or mound, waiting to be opened. The murals are romantic, verging on an unearned sublimity. They celebrate the workings of time and the wonder provoked by the unspoiled; but their presence in a room filled with artifacts from the site suggests they are meant to celebrate archaeology as the romance of origins and archaeologists as figures of heroic power. If the murals had been painted in the last century, they would simply seem mythmaking at the expense of the past. But painted in 1936, these murals suggest that the ruin is an intact site precisely because from it one can make the past one desires. Almost forgotten, these murals may be the most cautionary display in Berlin about the ideological dangers of reading the past.

Fragments

Often it is the fragment that helps you resist seeing Berlin as allegory. Details preserve the character of the place:

(1) in the trainyards of East Berlin, a black, coal-burning steam locomotive fires up next to a white bullet-train;

(2) WEST cigarettes, sold in West Germany long before the *Wende*, are advertised with heroin-chic models and an English slogan, "The Power of Now";

(3) old Trabants parked on the streets gain new life as movable signs for restaurants and shops;

(4) water mains, painted bright colors like pink or yellow or lavender, run twelve to fifteen feet above the sidewalk because the underground lines are unusable;

(5) bored riot police waiting out a demonstration on Unter den Linden pass the time by fixing the windshield wipers on their water-cannon truck;

(6) a menu in a trendy restaurant offers Boston spareribs with the promise that they are a traditional American specialty;

(7) the globe of the old East German television tower, called from its shape *Telespargel* or "TV Asparagus," shows the reflected rays of the setting sun from the west in the form of a Christian cross;

(8) a punk pisses openly on Friedrichstrasse and then meticulously places his beer can in a recycling bin;

(9) signs on buses and trucks proclaim *Lotto macht Millionäre, Wodka Gorbatschow, Tour Nostalgie* (on a 1920s-style bus), *Deutsche Bank, Manhattan Ice Dream, The American Dream of Ice*;

(10) the *Tränenpalast*, or "Palace of Tears," where families separated by the division of Germany would say their farewells at the Friedrichstrasse Bahnhof, has become a music hall and beer garden.

Leipzigerstrasse

Along Leipzigerstrasse, where the huge, block-long apartment buildings of 1970s East Berlin stand, there's a windblown feeling: lots of scale and an empty monumentality that seem utterly unlike the closed-in feeling of residential neighborhoods from pre–World War II Berlin. Walking past these grandiose buildings, you feel exposed, open to view, without any of the protection that the nooks and crannies of older Berlin give the walker: arcades, courtyards, deeply recessed doorways. It is an unpleasant place to be caught in a sudden downpour. And when I was caught, huddled under the awning of a Chinese restaurant at the corner of Jerusalemerstrasse, the thought came to me that this lack of protection, this exposure to the elements had everything to do with the politics of the old regime. You were meant to be exposed, to be out in the open without a nook or cranny to shelter in. That regime may be gone but an outsider can still sense how it worked by moving through its public spaces.

Now, the shops along Leipzigerstrasse have shiny facades and plenty of goods on display: bright clothes, discount electronics, cheerful housewares. McDonald's advertises prominently, and its images of golden arches seem perfectly in place. The only shabby—in fact the only vacant—commercial space for blocks

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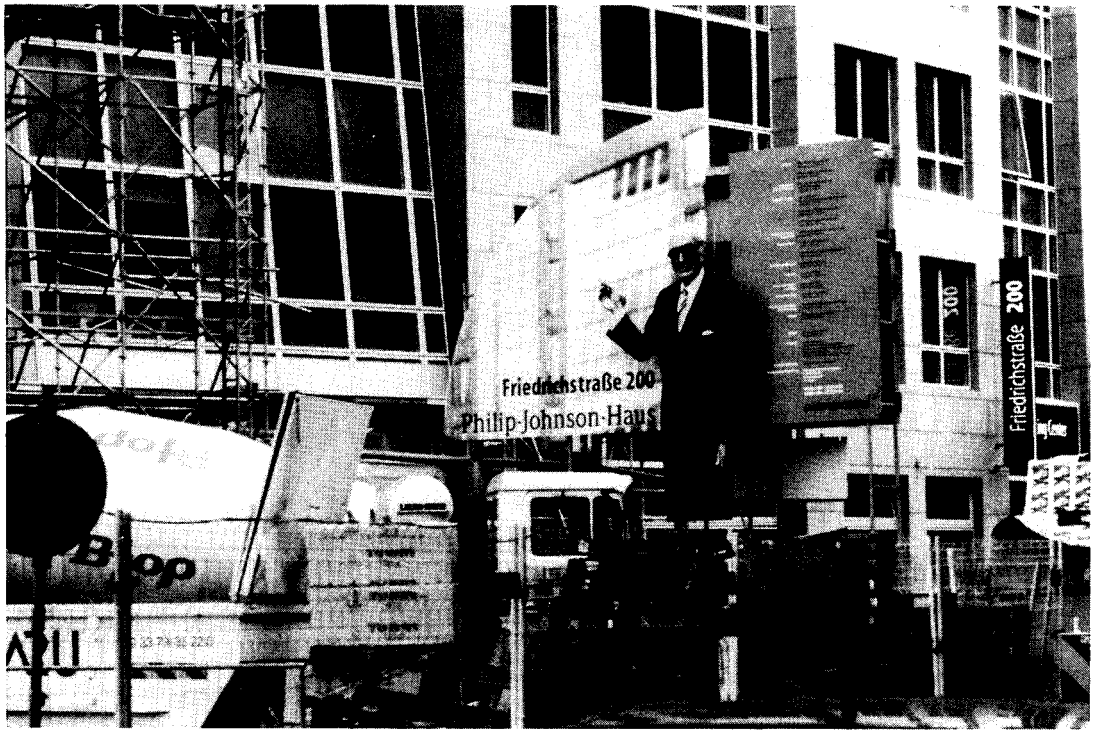

NICHOLAS HOWE

is the PRAHA restaurant in what had once been the Czech Center. Its windows are coated with several years of grime and letters are falling out of the old signs. Nobody wants to eat there anymore. Or needs to.

Alexanderplatz

The old proletarian neighborhood of Alfred Döblin's novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz* is long gone. Now it is a vast open space with, at its middle, the "Fountain of Friendship between Peoples." Even on a sunny day in June the place makes you think of bleak December afternoons when the sky is gray and the wind blows old newspapers round and round. The empty ceremonial spaces of East Germany, such as the Alexanderplatz, have a brutality that persists despite the change of government and the inrush of capitalist consumerism. Even in rebuilt form, these spaces seem too big. Since the *Wende*, new shops have moved in and neon signs display the names of international business: Mazda, Denon, Fanta, Sanyo, Speedo. On one edge of the platz, across the street, a socialist-realist mural of noble workers appears in the same view as a huge blue sign for FIAT. On the other edge, a tight circle of punks huddles under a covered walkway at the edge of the place. Against the unrelieved black of their clothes, the only visible color comes from the red and white chevrons of their Marlboro packs.

Checkpoint Charlie

The officially posted text on the fence reads: "Checkpoint Charlie, once the political focal point of the cold war, now is a construction site for five new buildings and will become a prominent symbol of free trade." One of the buildings has been designed by Philip Johnson, a fascist sympathizer in the 1930s. Now, finally, he gets his chance to be a master-builder in Berlin. At this moment, it all comes together: his old politics, his edifice complex, his status as the favorite architect of late international capitalism. On the billboard at the site of Friedrichstrasse 200 he stands smiling and pointing to a rendering of the building still under construction. The building, as it emerges, promises to be utterly clichéd, a box of metal and glass with a few postmodern flourishes that could be anywhere corporations build

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headquarters. The architect's major contribution seems to be his name: Philip-Johnson-Haus. Where once the CIA and the Stasi stared at each other from the upper floors of grimy buildings along the Wall, there will be a new crossing zone for money. The cold war ends in a farce of postmodern kitsch. Checkpoint Charlie becomes Checkpoint Cash.

About a kilometer north, on the blocks between Unter den Linden and the River Spree, Friedrichstrasse is being completely rebuilt, from sewer lines to new sidewalks. From a certain angle, the construction barriers and heavy equipment that force cars to move at a crawl and to shift lanes constantly look like nothing so much as photos of the eastern side of the old Checkpoint Charlie. Bulldozers have replaced tanks, and the danger to anyone crossing comes from an accelerating BMW rather than a border guard's machine gun, but the pattern of traffic flow seems eerily to reenact what once stood blocks to the south on Friedrichstrasse.

Looking at the streets of Berlin means learning to read the reenactment of place: the old patterns that seemed gone forever reemerge in unexpected ways. These patterns reveal and distort at the same time, and thus remind you that all claims about this city and its history must be provisional. To complete the metaphor by making it literal again, the streets are filled with detours and unexpected turnings so that even a one-way street, an *Einbahnstrasse,* will be reversed for a few days so trucks can serve a building site.

Tourists

The *Wende* is still so recent that Mitte is filled with West German vistors. Overheard snatches of tourist-guide talk on Unter den Linden make clear that this is a place whose history must be told and retold to Germans as well as to outsiders. There are buses from elsewhere in Europe, though hardly as many as there would be in a similar area of Paris. Most of them have signs that declare their German provenance. Many are from the more distant states, especially Bavaria. They are so numerous that it can be difficult to photograph a historic site, especially one that has an obvious vantage point that an idling bus can occupy. They pull up, one after the other, while the guides deliver their spiels to the seated tourists, and then move on to the next site. The spot is filled immediately by the next bus in line. On a Thursday morning I waited for more than half an hour so I could photograph without including a bus the balcony from which Karl Liebknecht proclaimed the socialist republic in 1918. When I got my photographs developed, I saw the one I took with the buses jammed in front of the balcony was more evocative than the one I waited so long to take because it showed that the site was a public spectacle.

Sitting out a rainshower on a Saturday afternoon under the Brandenburg Gate, I was approached by a young man from Egypt (as he explained) who asked in impeccable English if I knew much about the place. He was dressed in expensive sports gear and carried a shopping bag from Planet Hollywood. He could have been anywhere or from anywhere. When I told him I knew a bit about Berlin, he seemed relieved and quickly asked which was east and which was west. I pointed east and then west. So much for my obsession with history and geography.

Modern History

The voices of history that reverberate across Berlin are most visibly present to the eye in the concentration camp at Sachsenhausen, just outside the city. The museum there, built in 1961 by the GDR, still maintains its original display of black-and-white photographs from the old days of Party leaders laying wreaths and inaugurating the ghastly memorial to the political prisoners who were killed there by the Nazis. At the center of each photograph, or so it seems in my memory, are figures of the regime in dark suits and hats; they look prosperous, certain of the role they are playing at this site, convinced. On the edges of these photographs are those who had been political prisoners in Sachsenhausen. Their faces, especially in the older photographs, seem shadowy, difficult to interpret, withdrawn in the midst of the public ceremony they are attending. Accompanying each photo is a neatly typed label in German giving the

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date it was taken and the names of those it depicts. The Sachsenhausen of these displays is less a museum than a martyrology, a site of unwavering heroism, as is apparent from the socialist-realist images in stained glass that greet you at the museum's entrance and from the memorial of poured concrete at the far end of the camp. The tower of that memorial is unadorned except for red triangles like those worn by the political prisoners of the Nazis. No other group of prisoners is remembered by this monument.

From the photos in the original GDR installation you will not learn that for five years after the war's end the Russians used Sachsenhausen as a prison for their political enemies and then handed it over to the GDR to use for the same purpose. In this installation, Sachsenhausen's history as a concentration camp ceases in 1945 when it was liberated by the Russian army. Subsequent years go unmarked, just as prisoners who were not political go unnoticed. After the *Wende* another voice was added to the museum's walls to speak—of necessity and by design—alongside that from the GDR period. On long scrolls that hang from the ceiling appears in large bold print the complicated history of the camp in the years before and after 1945. The voices telling this story speak in both German and English. That this revisionist account of Sachsenhausen also appears in English gives it the authority to reach the larger world.

Nothing in the museum can finally speak to the desolation of the camp. Most of the barracks are gone, each marked in absence by a large block of stone that bears its number. The exterior walls and guard towers remain, as does some of the barbed wire, rusted and broken into bits. The site is mainly a large grass field, with a few wildflowers of white and blue. On a hot June afternoon the dust blows off the paths.

In the midst of the open ground, a tent stands to document where in 1992 neo-Nazis torched several of the surviving barracks that had once held Jewish prisoners. Inside the tent are exhibits of the destroyed barracks because the desire to eradicate history, to burn it to the ground, must itself be remembered. And that becomes another voice in your head as you walk the camp, one that must somehow be included along with those that hang beside each other on the walls of the museum, and with those that can no longer speak for themselves.

Walking into Sachsenhausen I passed some teenagers photographing each other beside the sign on the gate that reads "ARBEIT MACHT FREI." On leaving, I passed a group of Gypsies coming to mourn their dead. Another people's voice to hear, to record.

From the River

The view from the River Spree, except around Museum Island in Mitte, is not like the view from the Thames or the Seine. Berlin did not plan its buildings and public spaces around the river but inland because it was a Prussian military city and needed grand avenues and parade grounds to display its infantry. Yet from a boat on the Spree you gain an unintended vantage point for seeing the city. Everything becomes disoriented when you look, for example, at the Reichstag from an oblique distance so that, in the foreground, a vast construction site fills the space where the Wall ran to the river.

For most of the run, the trip on the Spree is a pleasant excursion, especially in the west where its banks are heavily treed and people use the greenspace to stroll, play with kids, escape the pavement of the city. It seemed right that one German couple brought their big dog along on the boat. He slept, they drank beer, all were happy. Part of that happiness came, I suspect, from the fact there is little history visible from the Spree. The Charlottenburg Palace is not, like the Louvre or the Tower of London, built on the river. Only as the boat makes its turn through Mitte and the Museum Island does one get a feeling that this is a city where too much has happened: the Bode and Pergamon Museums, the Prussian Arsenal that is now the historical museum, Humboldt University, the Cathedral, the Palace of the Republic. One senses that these buildings relate to each other, that they have always formed the center of the city throughout its various incarnations. To get this coherence you need to return to the streets and move among the buildings. That the city does not derive its plan from the river is proof

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of its martial character, and modernity.

In Berlin, where the intended view is often too painful to hold for long, it is useful to see from the oblique, from the unintended angle that is opened up by changes of history. Put it this way: the angles of sight in Berlin are those of grand avenues and ceremonial approaches, such as the Brandenburg Gate with its chariot and four horses facing east, the Quadriga. These angles of sight carry with them political impositions. To see otherwise, as from the river, is a relief, an opening into what was not intended or desired. Much the same holds for looking at buildings wrapped in plastic and scaffolding, or for glimpsing the Brandenburg Gate across a construction fence covered with bright posters for a spectacle called "Erotik-Life." At such moments, nothing looks imperial and thus nothing looks as it was meant to look in Berlin.

The New Watch

The Käthe Kollwitz statue of a mother holding the dead body of her adult son is low to the ground, heavy, maternal. She is meant to hold all the griefs of this world. Despite its earnestness, its somber dull bronze, this statue of the earth mother stands for nothing so much as the failure of representational art. It wants to rip our guts out, to make us howl for all the sorrows of our century, and thus fails. It lacks the mute eloquence of the memorial to the book burning across Unter den Linden. The statue looks like nothing so much as a pietà, and sets off questions about what is being remembered and how it is to be remembered. For if this monument does acknowledge, as the sign outside says, victims of the "Konzentrationslager," then why is the image here so resonant of Christianity? Or, more precisely, of the Christian story about the son who was sacrificed by his father for the redemption of humankind? For what can that say to those who would remember the six million of the Holocaust?

These questions about the statue are ways of saying that there is something more than a little confused about this site. Built originally as a guardhouse for the Prussian emperor's watch in 1818, it became: in 1931, a monument to German troops who fell in World War I; in 1960, a GDR memorial for the victims of fascism and militarism; in 1969, the resting place for an unknown soldier and an unknown camp victim; in 1993, a place of memory as well for civilian victims of Nazism and those who resisted totalitarian dictatorship after 1945. Too many people have put the memorial at the Neue Wache to too many purposes. It must bear as a result an impossible name: "Central Memorial of the Federal Republic of Germany for the Victims of War and Tyranny."

Inside the building itself there is a gloomy solemnity. The floor of irregular, small dark-gray paving stones, the walls made from blocks of lighter gray limestone are subdued, even anti-monumental. Above the statue of mother and son is a round skylight that focuses the light on these two figures as if to offer a ray of hope, a beam of illumination; but one knows they cannot be so easily illuminated. Very few visitors descend the two shallow steps from the entrance level to the floor of paving stones, where the statue rests, though that is permitted and some have left flowers at its base. There seems to be a felt need here not to walk too close, not to cross the symbolic space of memory. At such places, even a few feet of distance becomes necessary.

It seemed better to me to look through the vertical iron bars that close off the two side entrances because that evokes the photographs taken in 1945 during the liberation of the camps. I kept thinking of the gaunt, skeletal faces that stared out at the photographers from behind the fences, those specters who somehow managed to survive. And then the heaviness of the Kollwitz figures becomes almost unbearable. Their physical weight, their fleshiness itself seems a form of denial. Grief here should be skeletal, gaunt, the last remains of the human body at the edge of extinction.

The statue seems wrong in another way. It conveys a vision of war in which young men suffer actively and die, while their mothers suffer passively and survive, one in battle and the other at home. But the twentieth century has had no place for such chivalric roles as the valiant fallen son and the nobly grieving mother. To memorialize women with this statue effaces the suffering and death women themselves knew in a

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time when there were no distinctions between the killing fields and home.

Opernplatz, Now Bebelplatz

When the books were burned on May 10, 1933, Opernplatz was a parklike space with trees. Now at the center of its paving stones there is a square of glass, perhaps 1.5 meters square, set flush to the ground. It opens to a view of a larger room below. On each side of this room, which is perhaps three meters square, is a tier of ten bookshelves that runs from floor to ceiling. The interior is painted white. All of the shelves are empty. As a German friend said to me wisely, how else can you memorialize something that has been burned and is no more? There is a muteness here that seems infinitely moving. Set as it is amid—yet below—the grandiose buildings along Unter den Linden, the starkness of this memorial seems just because it is silent. Two small bronze plaques on either side of the glass square record the event and quote three lines from Heine on the human cost of book burning. It is a place of infinite sadness.

Now, several years after the memorial was installed, its thick green glass is scuffed and, at certain times of the day, difficult to see through. In the morning, when the sun shines at an angle, you must put it behind you so you can cast a shadow that cuts the glare and lets you look past the glass to the white interior. At no time of the day can you photograph through the glass to the room below; you can only photograph those looking at it from above. It is a memorial that rejects the idea of the monumental as publicly visible, as calling attention to itself. From Unter den Linden, perhaps fifty meters away, you will not know it is there, though you may wonder why there are people staring at the paving stones of the place. The book memorial rejects what looms behind on Unter den Linden, the monument of Frederick the Great looking eastward. That statue now seems an unconscious parody of empire's pomp: lots of metal, a big horse, grandly phrased inscriptions. The book memorial sinks below the surface to remember what happened and then what was suppressed. Under the communist regime, the site was a parking lot.

This monument seems complete precisely because it cannot be photographed through its glass and reproduced mechanically. It forces one to look at the site itself and remember it not as image but as the space of a defining historical event. That it denies viewers the conventional gestures of mourning may be grasped from the fact that not once in the month during which I visited it daily did I see a bouquet of flowers laid there. I saw bouquets at the Neue Wache across the street, I saw them on Frederick the Great's grave at Sans Souci in Potsdam as well as at his statue on Unter den Linden, I saw one placed among the stones of the bombed-out Frauenkirche in Dresden. But never at Bebelplatz.

A different memorial to the book burning occurs daily in the front courtyard of the main university building across Unter den Linden. Sellers of used books set up their tables and do a good business with students, faculty, and tourists. From a certain angle, one can look through the book-buyers to see across the street to where, flush to the ground and mute, rests the memorial to the burning of the books. That view of people freely reading books is worth more than all the bouquets left at the other sites of memory.

Columbus, Ohio

As I finish writing these notes about Berlin, I receive a summons for jury duty in federal court. I arrive at the appointed time but, after answering a few questions, I am excused from service because I know too much about this case involving a local Neo-Nazi warlord. Having been convicted of robbing banks to finance his political group, he now faces charges arising from a gunfight with the FBI when he was arrested less than two years ago. Of the two hundred and twenty people called for jury duty, only twenty-five or thirty ask to be excused because they have prior knowledge of the case. A past so recent it can only be called the present slips out of memory here in Ohio, and I think again how much harder it must be to remember in a city like Berlin filled with monuments and memorials. ●

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Toward a Politics of Democratic Ambivalence

Jeffrey C. Isaac

MITCHELL COHEN'S essay "Why I'm Still 'Left' " (*Dissent*, Spring 1997) presents a strong argument for the continuing relevance of a "left" political identity. Cohen addresses the widespread sense that "left" politics has become outmoded, a sense given powerful expression by Francis Fukuyama's essay on "the end of history," which declared that with the downfall of communism, liberal democracy had proven to be the most progressive form of politics, the final stage in the political evolution of humankind. Cohen rejects such a complacent reading of history. As he points out, what is at stake is more than terms like "liberal," "socialist," or "left." What is at stake are important values that have been associated with "the left," especially the values of liberty, equality, and solidarity.

Among these values equality seems to hold pride of place for Cohen, and his essay centers around those forces, mainly associated with globalization, that are intensifying economic inequality. The question before us, he holds, is how, in the face of the inadequacies of liberalism, "do we discipline the processes of globalization on behalf of democratic precepts and (nonmarket) human needs and values?" Such a democratic and humane regulation of economic forces constitutes the historical project of the left, and so Cohen argues that, as a supporter of this project, he is "still left."

I don't agree with Cohen, but neither do I disagree with him. Indeed, it is the business of pledging one's ideological allegiance that I mean to call into question.

Cohen seeks to defend no party line or official position. Yet he does want to assert that the political conflicts of our time can be reduced to an ideological opposition between "left" and "right." To be more precise, he is saying that there are a range of positions on a left/right continuum, and that he wishes to stake out a specific position—a *democratic* left one—along this line. What I want to suggest is not that Cohen's "left" position is to be rejected, but that a more ambivalent attitude toward this positioning is more appropriate. Such a politics of ambivalence is a reasonable politics that might still incorporate much that Cohen seeks to defend.

Cohen has offered some very good reasons why he is still "left," and they all point to a single important fact—that the left is not dead and has not historically been superseded. The vitality of the left can be understood in a number of ways. One is as the vitality of a "left" partisan identification. There can be no doubt, as Norberto Bobbio argues in his *Left and Right: The Significance of a Political Distinction*, that the parties of the left are still players to be reckoned with in the liberal democratic game, especially in Europe. Recent social democratic electoral victories in France and Great Britain demonstrate this. As for the future of these parties, only time will tell. But the claim that they have no future is plainly fatuous.

There is an even deeper sense in which the left remains alive—as a tradition of inquiry and social criticism. To be on the left is not simply to declare one's preference for the current parties of the left, but also to take inspiration from a theoretical corpus that includes the writings of Marx, Bernstein, Luxemburg, Trotsky, and Gramsci; Orwell, Silone, Camus, Buber, and Weil; Debs, Tawney, and Harrington; and from a political tradition that includes the trade union and syndicalist movements, the Paris Commune, the various socialist, communist, and labor parties, and the forms of social de-

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mocracy that became prominent in the twentieth century. This is a complex tradition, but there can be no doubt that it has made important contributions to democratic politics and social justice, and that these contributions should be honored rather than repudiated (the failures of this tradition should equally be remembered, and repudiated rather than honored). To say that one is on the left is to say that one wishes to continue this legacy, and this is surely something worth saying.

Finally, as Cohen points out, the left is alive as an egalitarian ethos that has become ever more precious. Few today would deny that "all men are created equal." And yet there are still many who advance spurious arguments to justify extraordinary inequalities, whether these arguments draw on sociobiology or laissez-faire economics. To be "on the left" is to identify with a robust egalitarianism, to believe that most kinds of inequality are unjustifiable.

Yet things are more complicated than this. Consider Cohen's narrative of what it means to be "left," and what concerns are left out of this narrative:

- nationality, immigration, and human rights
- race and ethnicity
- gender and sexuality
- religion and questions of "ultimate meaning"
- the difficulties of sustaining democratic participation given the forces of commercialization and trivialization that pervade the culture of advanced industrial societies.

One doesn't have to declare oneself a partisan of "multiculturalism" or "postmodernism" to note that these phenomena represent some of the most pressing political problems of our time, and that they mobilize a great deal of moral and political energy, often more energy than the economic problems that concern Cohen, myself, and the typical *Dissent* reader. Indeed, such problems are frequently addressed by *Dissent*. I note, for example, the Summer 1996 special issue on "Embattled Minorities Around the Globe," in particular Cohen's introduction to that issue. Yet a discussion of such concerns is not included in Cohen's powerful account of why he remains "left."

Why is this? Not because such problems don't concern him, but because many of them lie outside of the "left" political project, and indeed the standard left/right continuum.

Such discourses as "multiculturalism," "postcolonialism," and "postmodernism" in part represent efforts to understand these phenomena. That such approaches have contributed to the fragmentation of the left, especially in the United States, goes without saying. It is a point that has frequently been acknowledged in these pages, notably by Todd Gitlin. Gitlin has argued that the left has lost its moorings and its faith in a "universal" project, and he attributes this in large part to the intellectual and cultural excesses of the sixties, excesses that include multiculturalism and postmodernism. These discourses do suffer from their own forms of arrogance and intellectual narrowness. But I think that it is less these discourses themselves than the political developments they have sought to register that have contributed to the weakening of the left. It is not simply a question of political style or postmodern skepticism about "common ground." It is that these developments either are outside of the horizon of the historic left or cross-cut the left/right continuum in complex ways.

As I CONTEMPLATE the complexity of these issues, it becomes impossible for me to say just what exactly a "left" view of them is. Is there a distinctively "left" perspective on the rights of national minorities, for example, or the plight of refugees, or the right of gay people to marry? This sort of question hit home for me during the Gulf War, when it became difficult for me to discern what an authentic "left" position would be, and where the standard left positions in play—anticolonial rhetoric, moralistic denunciation of nationalism, military noninterventionism, along, of course, with a healthy dose of anti-Zionism—rang hollow. *Dissent* writers published a number of interesting pieces during this period and, as the magazine itself acknowledged, *Dissent* was deeply divided about the war. Although I did not fully agree with what Cohen had to say (*Dissent*, Winter 1991), I think both he and Michael Walzer raised important issues not typically discussed on the

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left. Yet it is hard for me to see how their arguments were *distinctively* left at all. The Gulf War raised a number of issues that do not easily fit within the standard left/right framework. The same is true, I would argue, of more recent events in Bosnia.

If "postmodern" idioms represent one way of acknowledging this, the burgeoning of interest in civil society, also noted in many *Dissent* essays, especially those by Michael Walzer, speaks to these developments in other ways. This literature underscores the practical and ethical vulnerabilities of welfare-state bureaucratism; the importance of intermediate associations in a democratic society; and the centrality of *complex* rather than simple equality, that is to say, the irreducibility of questions of justice to a simple scheme of "more" versus "less" equality. If Walzer is right, then it becomes difficult to give a single meaning to the claim that one is "for equality," because equality now becomes a complex project, in which questions of socioeconomic distribution lose their ethical priority, and in which other discourses—ethical, aesthetic, religious—necessarily come into play.

None of these complications are registered in Cohen's account of why he is still "left." This is not a sign of the narrowness of his thinking, but a sign of the narrowness of "left" imagery. Had Cohen written an essay on "What I Think," then such issues would have received more attention. But in an essay about "Why I'm Still 'Left' " they have no place.

As Cohen notes, the imagery of "the left" derives from the ideological divisions that emerged during the French Revolution, pitting those who supported "progress" against those who supported "reaction." For or against? This imagery is essentially binary. Although I believe that this imagery has served liberatory purposes, I don't believe it still can. While the question of more or less socioeconomic equality surely continues to be pressing, it can no longer serve—if it ever could—to plausibly define the universe of important political concerns. Yet to be on "the left," it seems, requires that this should be the defining political question.

Don't get me wrong. I care deeply about socioeconomic inequality. I grew up in a trade union household. My father permanently lost his job as a Linotype operator when I was thirteen, and I experienced firsthand the injustices of capitalism. I still bridle at these injustices. I still believe that the labor movement is a necessary precondition of social justice and democracy. And I believe that the current distribution of wealth and power ought to be challenged in the name of egalitarian justice. But I don't believe that these issues can have the same ethical, political, and, indeed, metaphysical centrality that they have had for the left since the time of the French Revolution. The world has changed in too many ways for that. There are too many important concerns—communal, parental, associational, religious, aesthetic, ecological, human—that are undreamed of in the "left" philosophy.

So what am I? Where do I stand? This is not a question that can be answered with an ideological label. Left or right? Socialist or liberal or conservative? If I were forced to give a label, I think I would describe myself as a *democrat*, someone who believes that in our world of plural identities and plural injustices, the most important thing is for citizens to be free to contest and negotiate the terms of their own association. The label "democratic left" is not inappropriate, insofar as it suggests that many traditionally "left" concerns about socioeconomic equality must be central to democratic politics, that class conflict is a central form of contestation in a capitalist society, and that class privilege ought to be subjected to vigorous challenge. But for me the democratic is more than a qualifier: it is the most important of political values, the value that makes it possible to adjudicate the other values cited above.

Cohen would not deny that the political universe has changed, but he feels comfortable reaffirming that he still "stands" for the same things, in the same place, "on the left." For myself, I am not sure where I stand. In some ways I feel as if my values are still on the left, but in other ways I'm not so sure. I know that the deepening of political space has complicated my values, freed me up to acknowledge the range of my concerns—as a Jew, as a parent, as a member of the human species, as a congenital nonconformist—and

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also ethically challenged me in new and disturbing ways.

Left parties and left critiques still have much to offer to those interested in freedom and justice. Sustainable development advocacy, new global labor networks, struggles against environmental racism, and union drives to organize women of color all represent important efforts to join traditionally left concerns to new social movements and concerns. And more traditional forms of labor movement building and left activism retain their importance. Yet there is also too much of importance left out of "the left" for it to define a distinctive political identity appropriate for the political world of today. I have treated this primarily as a question of personal commitment, but it is equally a question of political organization. What it means, I think, is that "the left" can only succeed as a participant in a broader and deeper democratic political space that is pluralistic, fractious, and improvisational, a space that is open to questions that lie beyond the standard framework of the left. In my view the principal value of *Dissent* is that it continues to keep such questioning alive, sustaining a fruitful tension between the "left" identity that is its historical legacy, and the open-mindedness, come what may, that its very title proclaims.

JEFFREY C. ISAAC teaches political theory at Indiana University. His book *Democracy in Dark Times* was just published by Cornell University Press.

Mitchell Cohen Responds

JEFFREY C. ISAAC is a generous and provocative critic, yet I fear our disagreement may perplex some readers. He is right when he says that I still identify myself as "left" because of values—most simply, liberty, equality, solidarity. Where he calls for a "politics of democratic ambivalence," I uphold a "left politics," which, as I explained it, means favoring equality-friendly democracy—a society in which it is inequalities that must be justified. Readers may wonder: OK, but Isaac and Cohen are actually on the same side of many matters—they're not quarreling about the respective merits of, say, vibrant trade unionism or gender equality or racial justice—so what's the real substance of their disagreement? Didn't Cohen argue in "Why I'm Still 'Left' " for a pluralistic left that combines "discrimination and openness in its intellectual conversation," unwed to canons?

I think there is, first of all, a "metadisagreement" between us, to use a current way of characterizing these things. It is captured by Isaac's contrast between his "ambivalence" and what he calls my "binary" left imagery. His objections are not to "left values," only to claiming for them a political "space" and then centering one's politics there. He protests that things are more complicated than any single category allows; political space, for him, has now become too deep for a term like "left." The political universe, he warns, has changed.

Well, yes, the political universe has changed, but then it always does. And it has always been complex. In the past, as today, some on the left approached change and complexity with analytic and moral sophistication and some with dogma and banality. Rightists, centrists, and ideologists of the "end of ideology" aren't much different. Isaac's argument turns "the left" into a historical straw figure—undifferentiated, always in the "same place," divorced from and resistant to any meaningful pluralism, and thus easily contrasted with open-minded, postmodern ambivalence. Is this not itself a "binary" reduction—"left" versus "ambivalence"? A sense of ambivalence, the recognition of ambiguities, and perception of nuance are vital intellectual qualities; they can also be turned into an ideology (even a sectarian one—look at the "deconstructionists").

However, I am not gripped by ambivalence when I think of many primary features of our miserable twentieth century: fascism, genocide, Stalinism, imperialism, for starters. I am gripped, instead, by a sense of tragedy in the human condition—a sense sorely lacking on the left, I should note—but no less by the need

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to take sides. Sure, concepts like "left" are always neater than the messiness of the world; it doesn't follow that taking a position means that one simplifies everything that is complex. One can, unambivalently, support an alliance with Moscow against Hitler without diluting one's view of Stalinism. One can be anti-Stalinist and anti-McCarthyist at the same time. One can be an egalitarian without proposing that a single mold be imposed on all circumstances. As I see it, the argument between Isaac and myself is not about the value of skepticism, doubt, questioning, or, indeed, of ambivalence, but about ideologies of ambivalence.

However deep the political space, one has to begin somewhere in order to move in it. Where has America's political space actually moved in recent years—after twelve years of Reagan-Bush and now with Lott-Gingrich-Clinton? I grant the weaknesses of any single descriptive term. Still, it does seem fair to say that the country's political space, or most of it, has moved far to the right. If I'm "still left" today, this is because of where my political values fit—if you can call it fit— in a conservative universe. It is not because being "left" allows me to remain in a comfortable political space. Just when was it comfortable to be "left" in America? I find it troubling that almost all the voices insisting that "left" and "right" are passé hail from the left. Hardly a soul among conservatives says so, and I suppose it is because they recognize their advantage; the right knows how successful it has been at resetting the parameters of public discussion. Everyone else must "adjust."

Take Francis Fukuyama and his "end of history" thesis, cited by Isaac. Fukuyama proposed that debate between left and right, indeed, contention about all matters of consequence, is safely behind us since the fall of communism revealed liberal democracy, as he perceives it, to be humanity's highest political incarnation. I leave aside the implicit identification of "left" with communist dictatorships (yet again!); this association is, as I said in my original article, an affront to the memory of millions who identified themselves as "left" yet opposed and were persecuted by Leninist and Stalinist regimes. Instead, let's look a little more closely at where the end of history delivers us.

Several months ago, the *Weekly Standard* published a symposium in which respondents were charged with explaining the "peculiar" contemporary situation in which conservative ideas "seem to be in the ascendent" while their political representatives—Dole, Major, Juppé—lose elections. Fukuyama, in his contribution, wrote that we "live in an age when conservative ideas have become dominant" and noted that "if a big idea has been broadly accepted, then the contestation will be over smaller ideas or over personalities." Tony Blair, he commented, evidently with satisfaction, has "openly defended the core of the Thatcherite Revolution." The German Social Democrats, alas, have not yet been "Blair-ized." And those darned French who just ousted a right-wing government—how silly to "still believe in the possibilities of politics—i.e., that sovereign publics can vote for leaders who want to reorder social and political priorities regardless of what global bond markets say." Those *citoyens* must learn that "left" and "right" are meaningless. At the end of history we have the dictatorship of global bond markets. Happy day. Happy "liberal democratic" day.

To be "left," for me, is, among other things, to try to save the idea of democracy from this type of thinking. Put into practice, such thinking renders political democracy powerless. I tried to point this out in "Why I'm Still 'Left.'" If liberal democracy means that citizens should, through politics, have a real say over the basic conditions of their lives, then it is threatened by the "economic correctness" of our times—that is, by neoliberal economics, with its market mysticism and its sanctification of the pursuit of profit regardless of any social and political (that is, human) consequences. Since Fukuyama draws on Hegel to make his argument—a bit of a joke if you've actually studied Hegel—let me be "still left" by paraphrasing Schiller: one should be a child of one's time, not its disciple.

And here is a historical wrinkle about the use of terminology. When people inch away from the word "left" nowadays, they often em-

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brace "democrat" as an alternative. Isaac says that if, finally, he must accept a political tag, this is it. Well, I'm also a democrat and, as with "left," I say that without resignation. To be "left," I argued, is to have an expansive sense of democracy, to call for its extension into social and economic life. (It doesn't at all follow, as Isaac implies, that I think democracy or equality must have homogenous meanings in all domains; it means that I think unmerited power, privilege, or suffering cannot be justified in any of them.) Moreover, if we apply Isaac's argument about "left identity" to the history of "democratic identity," we'd be compelled to forswear it too.

Modern usages of "democracy" date from about the same time as "left," roughly the late eighteenth century. It was then, generally, a word of opprobrium. For most delegates at the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia, "democracy" meant a government and public life subject to unruly popular whims, with the persistent threat of mob rule. Remember, as some of them surely did, that Socrates was done in by a lynch mob in the guise of a jury in the first democracy. That's why the Founders offered themselves as republicans, with a Roman rather than an Athenian echo. Across the Atlantic, Edmund Burke protested that "perfect democracy" is "the most shameless thing in the world." When one historian, R.R. Palmer, examined how "democracy" was deployed as an epithet in the 1790s, he found it comparable to "communism" at the time he was writing, the early 1950s. Nobody used "democracy" to defend the idea of universal suffrage when it was debated in revolutionary France. Robespierre, however, identified a republic with democracy in his famous "Terror and Virtue" speech of February 1794, thus helping democracy's foes to identify it with terror.* In the nineteenth century democracy increasingly took on more positive connotations, often in struggles to extend the franchise and secure diverse rights for all citizens. That's "democracy" for most contemporary Americans. Yet in the twentieth century we were treated by Leninists/Stalinists to "democratic dictatorships" in Eastern Europe and elsewhere. Or were they "People's Democratic Republics?" In any case, who would want to be identified with "democrats" after them? or with "republics" or—heavens!—with "people"?

In short, the word "democrat" has a modern story comparable to the word "left." Its meanings have been plural. "Democracy" has been expropriated and abused. As a descriptive term, it has never been fully adequate to any reality (virtually all contemporary democracies have elites, a reasonable number of them undeserving, in virtually every sphere of life). And democracy does pose some problems in principle. Tyranny of the majority is a genuine issue, even if it has never been the general peril suggested by some.

FOR ALL this, "democrat" is still an honorable word to my mind, a word with which I readily identify. Not as a "pledge of ideological allegiance," but because I'm for equal citizenship in a free society, because I identify with people who fought for such goals during the last two centuries. At the same time I'm not simply a democrat—I'm a social democrat because my view of democracy is complex. I think dramatic disparities in socioeconomic power and privilege subvert political democracy and weave basic unfairness into the fabric of social life. It also makes sense to me when someone identifies as a specifically "liberal" democrat in order to complicate things; that is, to accentuate the importance of traditional liberal concerns like secure civil liberties. Adjectives, when they are modifiers and not appendages, can mean a lot.

I must acknowledge some bewilderment at Isaac's insistence that my "left identity" can't provide answers to all questions, since he recognizes that my article was on "Why I'm Still 'Left,'" not "My Correct Views about Everything." Isaac is right to say that my "narrative" of left concerns leaves out religion and "questions of ultimate meaning," although I find this an odd point for him to make after advocating a politics of ambivalence. Besides believing in tolerance, I think religion and "ultimate meaning" are best kept far from politics. On the other hand, it is true that my left position has broader implications; it is certainly not only a

*R.R. Palmer, "Notes on the Use of the Word 'Democracy,' 1789-1799," *Political Science Quarterly*, June 1953, p. 208.

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matter of economics. I defined left by an ethos that is democratic and humanist, equality-friendly and inclusive. In fact, this ethos stakes out an orientation and a sensibility toward many of the matters that, according to Isaac, are absent from my narrative, say, racial or gender discrimination. An ethos—not a party line with identical prescriptions to be applied, one after another, in every situation and place. I'd need to supply that sort of platform in order to respond to Isaac's repeated questioning: Is there a "left" position on this and this and that? Certainly I could present arguments as to what I think would be an appropriate "left position" on many of these issues, although others on the left might have different ideas. My sort of left is not Isaac's reified left, it is pluralistic. It's the sort of left represented by *Dissent* magazine when, in recent years, it offered Gitlin and Young and Walzer and Phillips and Cohen, among others, advancing some pretty diverse contentions about multiculturalism, all speaking from "the left."

This said, I do think that Isaac raises a real problem in the history of the left: the tendency to abstract universalism. This often materialized in the conviction that one idea takes care of everything. So nationalization of the means of production resolves all problems, especially those having nothing to do with production. Obviously, this was wrong, sometimes with pretty serious consequences. But the other extreme is now ascendent, insisting only on particularities, proclaiming tirelessly (and tiresomely) the fragmented nature of reality.

Well, I certainly don't believe the world has ever been "whole" (whatever that might mean), yet I am also not inclined to a politics of ontological tantrum. I think we must just get on with the impossible though inescapable business of being universals and particulars at once. But if the alternative to abstract universalism is "democratic ambivalence," then perhaps we'd best give up on politics altogether. If we're not going to give up, then we need to speak a language of democratic imagination and social possibilities. Not with illusions about the current political environment or with utopian delusions. But, yes, with social-democratic humanism. I'm not a disciple of the times; so I'm "still left." ●

MITCHELL COHEN is co-editor of *Dissent*.

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On the Defense of Public Schools

Dilemmas in a Conservative Era

Allen Graubard

In a recent essay in *Dissent* ("The Real Costs of Education," Spring 1996), Richard Rothstein provided an illuminating critique of the contention by many critics of the public schools that budgets have steadily risen over the past three decades while the system has continued on its disastrously failing path. His focus in the *Dissent* article was on the technical issue of how funding levels and needs are to be understood and why the image of increased funding is an illusion. But Rothstein's larger point is that the generally accepted judgment that public schools have been consistently "failing" is profoundly mistaken. This revisionist idea—that the much-maligned public system is in fact a success, steadily improving and respectable even on those international comparisons that most people believe show America's pathetic educational achievement (especially compared to those scary Asian students in Japan and Korea)—is gaining support in educational debates where the "myth of public school failure" has been dominant.

I believe that much of what Rothstein and other revisionists claim in their deconstruction of the common wisdom presented by media seers like George Will or Diane Ravitch about how awful schools are—so much worse than they were in the golden past, and so dangerous a threat to the country's economic, cultural, and moral future—is important and true. But I also think that the terms that frame the discussion repress an important perspective on school reform: the family of ideas labeled as "progressive education." It seems to me worthwhile to see how a defense of the institutional status quo has been taken up by political liberals like Rothstein, and echoed even in unreconstructed radical venues like Z magazine.

Rothstein presented the revisionist perspective most completely four years ago in "The Myth of Public School Failure," an essay published in the *American Prospect*. He argued that there is no shortage of educated workers at any level of the American labor force; that public school achievement has improved in recent years despite very little expansion in the funding of regular educational programs (most of the new money has been absorbed by "special education"); that only a very small proportion of school resources supports the administrative bureaucracy; that teachers have all the freedom they need for creativity and are not seriously constrained by the way traditional schools are governed, though bureaucracy does impose some cost in terms of innovation. The "iconoclastic conclusion" that he found "hard to avoid" is that "the public school system is mostly on the right track and the best way to improve the results, especially for minority children, is to pour more money into it."

Rothstein's message to his liberal *American Prospect* readers was that two prominent reform slogans—choice and decentralization (or "site-based management")—are bad ideas, likely to increase inequality, and unnecessary in any case because calls for extensive reform are based on seriously mistaken ideas about school failure. Such reforms should be opposed; the only reasonable policy is to invest enough money in education to equalize school funding, reduce class size, fully fund Head Start, establish a national prenatal health program, improve apprenticeship and workplace training, and raise teacher salaries. Then schools could improve on the remarkably good job they are already doing.

Rothstein also advised union leaders (most prominently at that time, the late Al Shanker) to curtail their collusion in the myth of dismal

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school performance, undertaken with the mistaken hope that the public will blame the "system" and its administrators while exonerating (and perhaps raising the salaries of) teachers. Teachers should instead trumpet the astonishing success of the public schools, and argue that even greater progress would follow if the resources needed to carry out Rothstein's very worthy list of policies were forthcoming. Rothstein recently repeated this advice in a piece in the *Los Angeles Times* calling on the new superintendent of the L.A. schools to repudiate Mayor Richard Riordan's condemnation of the city's public education as a "failed system." He suggests that, on the contrary, Los Angeles "needs a leader to brag about its success . . . ."

THIS CRITIQUE of the school-failure argument is important for clarifying what the real educational issues are and how they should be discussed. Recent economic trends have supported the revisionist repudiation of the hysteria about school-caused "illiteracy" producing an incompetent work force. Economic commentators now zestfully celebrate the rise of American productivity to world-leading levels, supporting sanguine appraisals of American superiority to the ailing economies of Germany and Japan.

It seems clear that the "performance" of public elementary and secondary schools over the past quarter century has not been a factor in changing productivity patterns. As Rothstein pointed out, corporate leadership had a P.R. incentive to shift attention from policies of its own that did clearly affect productivity (bad management, shortsighted investment, merger mania, and so forth). It was always a stretch to believe that Guadalajara drew investment by GM for a plant rated as one of its most productive because the local Mexican elementary schools are so good, providing a well-trained and literate workforce whose skills are superior to those of badly educated American workers from classrooms in Detroit and Flint.

But, as clarifying as all this is, the inferences about educational reform drawn from the revisionist analysis are, I think, seriously misleading. The discussion suppresses the old and well-founded progressive critique of the structures of schooling. Ironically, Rothstein finds himself driven to his approval of the basic soundness of the pedagogy, organization, and culture of the public schools and public-school bureaucracies (including the teachers' unions) because of his acceptance of a constricted framework set up by his opponents.

It is also ironic that this defense of the public schools has been characterized as "revisionist." During the 1960s, that word was used to describe a group of historians who were critical of the mainstream view of American public schooling as the unfolding success story of a system that grew increasingly democratic, fair, and inclusive. A representative statement of the old revisionist perspective can be found in a widely discussed book by the University of Pennsylvania historian Michael Katz. In *Class, Bureaucracy and Schools: The Illusion of Educational Change in America*, Katz wrote the following:

> There is a great gap between the pronouncement that education serves the people and the reality of what schools do to and for the children of the poor. Despite the existence of free, universal, and compulsory schooling, most poor children become poor adults. Schools are not the great democratic engines for identifying talent and matching it with opportunity. The children of the affluent by and large take the best marks and the best jobs . . . [American education] is and was universal, tax-supported, free, compulsory, bureaucratic, racist, and class-biased.

(Another less easily available text laying out the role of "tracking" in maintaining structures of inequality is Richard Rothstein's essay in a 1971 issue of the radical journal *This Magazine is About Schools*. That article is still worth reading and provides a provocative contrast to Rothstein's more recent suggestion that L.A. teachers should brag that "we work for the most successful institution of assimilation and mobility anywhere in the world, American public education.")

The new revisionists do not address such issues in their defense of public-school success—nor, obviously, do those who advance

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the "crisis" idea. For both sides of the debate, there is a shared frame that limits evaluation of school results to such collective statistical indicators as graduation rates, Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores, basic skills measured by objective tests, and later, the adequacy of the products of the system to fill the labor needs of the economy. Using this frame, it would seem to be a reasonable judgment that the American educational system (and probably the mass-education systems of every other industrialized society) has always been functionally successful.

To get a concrete sense of what gets cut out of the discussion of schools and education reform, it is useful to look back at the wave of radical reform during the late 1960s and early 1970s. I will concentrate on high school reform, since it is in terms of graduation rates, job skills, college entrance, and curriculum debates that the current discussion is most saliently carried on.

During that reforming period, when there were also numerous nationally discussed reports from governmental and foundation sources providing extensive criticism of high schools, a number of models of radical reform were created and widely publicized. These new institutions first arose in notable numbers as small, non-public "free schools," but these were soon followed by a rapid (and much more extensive) development inside the public schools. The most widely read manifesto of this reform impulse, Charles Silberman's *Crisis in the Classroom: The Remaking of American Education*, a national bestseller in 1970, included a detailed critique of the standard high school and a concrete account of the first years of a few prominent "alternative schools," as these new projects came to be called.

It is important to notice that most of the original alternative high school programs—either free-standing creations or "schools-within-a-school"—were developed in places like Newton High School and Brookline High School in prosperous Boston suburbs, or in Scarsdale and Great Neck, even more affluent New York suburbs. For the students, teachers, and parents involved in these alternative programs, there was no issue of academic failure or low test scores. These schools were among the most successful in the country in obvious ways. Moreover, the students who were attracted by the new programs were often among the highest-achieving students in these high-achieving schools. Skipping back through the history of school reform to Dewey and the earlier progressive school movements, we can see that what motivated reform wasn't the scary perception (unjustified then as now) that achievement scores or graduation rates were falling and economic well-being was threatened by a rising tide of mediocrity. The progressive education movement did not arise from a perception of measurable failure to master traditional skills and knowledge.

During the wave of high-school reform represented by "alternative schools," the frame for discussion was quite different from today's debate between crisis-myth proponents and their revisionist critics. The differences in the frame need to be emphasized in order to see why lumping together all proponents of reform as misguided, misinformed, and perhaps knowingly dishonest enemies of a good public institution succeeding admirably under difficult conditions, oversimplifies the debate.

The progressive argument applies to all students, regardless of their measured academic success. Deeper than results on standardized tests are the attitudes, self-image, caring, intellectual challenge, and emotional or affective aspects of school life. Causes and effects in these areas are necessarily vague, difficult to pin down with "objective" studies, but these ideas have real content and serious implications for how a school changes and influences young people, how the time in school feels, what sorts of commitment students, teachers, and parents have toward each other and their collective work. The model alternative programs shaped by these concepts look very different from the standard American high school.

THESE ARE the common themes of the progressive argument: schools should be relatively small in size, with teachers and students often on a first-name basis; they should introduce collective decision-making in all aspects of the school's life, experiment freely with pedagogical innovations, en-

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courage teachers to work closely with each other, and involve students systematically in the world outside of school through community service projects or internships. When projects addressing the "educationally disadvantaged" (both minority and white working class) were organized in poor urban areas, the situation was different in many ways from the wealthy "counterculture"-oriented suburban programs. But there was a remarkable similarity in the quality of relations among the participants, the small size that made these relations possible, the commitment to getting beyond the traditional organization of separate unrelated curricular pieces, and the increased role of teaching staff and students in critical evaluation of the program and its processes.

Reform-minded educators who engaged in policy discussions on schooling had in practice to accept the mainstream framework of debate, even if they were skeptical of its terms. So, when applying for grants or writing about their nontraditional ideas and methods, they trimmed their real beliefs, making claims about increased achievement or reduced dropout rates, noting that their target populations were those students who were not successful in the regular system. But among themselves, they would affirm what progressive school reformers have always taught: that the quality of the school experience, the development of curiosity, skeptical questioning, zest for learning, and related emotional aspects of the learning process would be better supported in the alternative schools and that traditional schooling was often detrimental to the growth of those qualities, even among students who were quite successful by conventional standards. Often there was also a sincere conviction, with anecdotal support, that in individual cases, impressive progress could be observed, and that significant collective improvement could be seen in commitment to and enjoyment of schooling, expressed in better attendance, less hostile behavior, higher graduation rates, even higher college-admission rates.

But the reformers recognized that, given the relatively brief time that students were involved in the new alternative high schools, major changes in markers like math and reading skills would be difficult to establish. The difficulty was the same for the "top" students, who were doing excellently in the traditional programs they wanted out of, as well as for the failing students who were attracted to programs developed for "at-risk" populations. In part, progressive educators, in their realistic and somber moods, affirm the approach that Christopher Jencks sketched in the conclusion to *Inequality: A Reassessment of the Effect of Family and Schooling in America*. Emphasizing the idea of variety and choice associated with liberal/left proposals for school reform, Jencks wrote the following:

> Instead of evaluating schools in terms of long-term effects on their alumni, which appear to be relatively uniform, we think it wiser to evaluate school in terms of their immediate effects on teachers and students, which appear much more variable. Some schools are dull, depressing, even terrifying places, while others are lively, comfortable, and reassuring. If we think of school life as an end in itself rather than a means to some other end, such differences are enormously important. Eliminating these differences would not do much to make adults more equal, but it would do a great deal to make the quality of children's (and teachers') lives more equal. Since children are in school for a fifth of their lives, this would be a significant accomplishment.
>
> Looking at schooling as an end in itself rather than as a means to some other end suggests that we ought to describe schools in a language appropriate to a family rather than to a factory. This implies that we will have to accept diverse standards for judging schools, just as we do for judging families. Indeed, we can even say that diversity should be an explicit objective of schools and school systems.

THIS MODEST, realistic, and generous perspective directly undercuts the inference that Rothstein makes in moving from good statistical results to a claim that the desire of teachers, students, and parents to create schools different from the traditional model has no valid rationale. Rothstein fears that school choice would hurt poor students by increasing segregation, and that decentrali-

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zation would bring about extensive corruption and force teachers to waste time on administrative chores that they would happily leave to central administration appointees. Speaking for myself and for many teachers I have worked with, I can only say that his informants have not told him the whole story if he really believes that no good teachers want to be part of autonomous schools or programs, where the staff has real power, beyond that which principals may decide to grant them. Initiatives like the Coalition of Essential Schools, with Central Park East Secondary School (the subject of Frederick Wiseman's documentary *High School II*) as its most visible model, and the New Visions network within the New York City system represent important attempts to reconfigure and revitalize the reform impulses of the 1970s.

EXCITEMENT, COMMITMENT, enthusiasm, disappointments, failures, surprising successes, and other unpredictable happenings can be expected when such opportunities are offered to teachers who want to live up to their own varied conceptions of what schools can be. What is hoped for are daily experiences of teachers and students that are more varied, joyful, engaged, and satisfying than many students and teachers currently have. Will such experiences be good for the individuals involved? I think so. But I don't know how to measure the good with the kinds of statistics that seem to be the only relevant criteria accepted by the mythmakers of school failure and their more accurate but not more imaginative opponents.

Although he may not intend to, Rothstein seems to lump together all those who talk about deep and radical changes in the form and spirit of schooling, leaving out of the debate the history of progressive education ideas and the complex connections of those ideas to broader ideas of political and social change. So he is able to connect reform ideas to Reaganite political culture, "the suspicion of all public institutions and [the] conviction that if public bureaucracy is responsible, performance must be deficient." What I suspect is that Rothstein believes that at this historical juncture, when the left is weak and conservative antigovernment doctrines are hegemonic, the kind of analysis historically connected with progressive education can only add to the destructive attacks of the William Bennetts, Rush Limbaughs, and Ross Perots who trash the schools along with all other public institutions. The rightward shift of ideological debate, along with the decline of a visible left movement that could defend a utopian vision, makes it unrealistic now to press the radical critique.

That sounds plausible, and realistic in tactical terms. But applied to the realm of education and public schools, I don't accept it, intellectually, politically, or practically—not just as a nostalgic sixties person but as a nineties teacher working in urban public schools and trying to revive the spirit of radical reform. For those of us committed to the old vision and still working in public education, the growing acceptance of reform ideas—including "choice"—provides a basis for affirming the progressive critique of standardized, bureaucratic schooling. This vision continues to have a powerful appeal because it takes seriously deep issues that Dewey and other progressive educators identified a century ago, issues that are still pressing once we move beyond test scores. (Remember that Paul Goodman, in his listing of "failed revolutions" in American history, noted progressive education as one of the promising programs still waiting to be implemented.) For those of us who are deeply dissatisfied with the traditional forms of schooling, there is a difficult challenge—to oppose the mistaken and sometimes malevolent trashing of the public schools and their teachers while maintaining the integrity of a well-founded and complex radical critique of the system. Public school "failure" is one kind of myth and should be clarified; but not by putting forward a different myth, even when the motives are more decent.

ALLEN GRAUBARD is the author of *Free the Children: Radical Reform and the Free School Movement* (1972) and co-author of *Saving Remnant: Feeling Jewish in America* (1992). He is researching a study on secondary-school reform tentatively titled *Why High Schools Never Change: Contradictions of Reform.*

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Richard Rothstein Replies

ALLEN GRAUBARD notes my claim that the alliance between so-called progressive school reformers and conservative critics who dominate our public education debates serves only the latter's purposes. As the growing strength of voucher plans and for-profit contractors (such as Chris Whittle's Edison Project) attest, political support for public education has weakened; "progressive" attacks on "traditional" schools have contributed to this loss of credibility. Further, I have contended that the "school choice" programs supported by Graubard and others, while ostensibly designed to create opportunities for quality innovation and incentives to excel, will, if expanded, inevitably lead to greater race and class segregation of American schooling. The history and logic of choice programs make clear that the effect, intended or otherwise, of school choice programs is to encourage parents and teachers to choose to associate with people like themselves.

I and others (whom Graubard terms "revisionists") have complained that the attacks on public education mounted by both "progressives" and "conservatives" have obscured a dramatic accomplishment of the last quarter century: impressive attainment gains of minority youth, and considerable narrowing of academic achievement gaps between white and minority students, especially African-Americans. I conclude that those who wish to continue (and perhaps accelerate) these results would do well to cease attacks on public schools and instead support reforms that seem to have been effective, directing more resources for reduced class sizes and other compensatory programs to schools serving minority students. Finally, I assert that those who wish for a more egalitarian society cannot burden the schools with major responsibility for this goal, notwithstanding schools' contributions to it. If (as is the case) the fastest growing occupations in the American workforce are in unskilled retail and service sectors, we do not escape these trends simply by training everyone to be a software designer. Rather, we should devote somewhat less political energy to demands that we provide for everyone an advanced education, and more attention to improving the relative wages, benefits, working conditions, and living standards of retail and service workers and their families.

Graubard finds this set of propositions contradictory to "revisionist" analyses with which I associated myself a quarter century ago. Then, revisionists emphasized the extent to which schools assisted in the reproduction of an inegalitarian social structure by "tracking" students from poor and minority families to occupy subordinate occupational roles. Although the primary emphasis of these earlier studies was correct—that schools cannot themselves be expected to create an egalitarian social and occupational structure and that, so long as inequality persists, it would be politically inconceivable in a democracy for schools to function as purely meritocratic channelers to this structure—the rigidity of these earlier views could be relaxed somewhat, in light of the last thirty years' experience.

Briefly, one of the major scandals of thirty years ago has been corrected: blacks' high-school completion rates are now nearly identical to those of whites. There is still a gap in the quality of black and white students' degrees, but the gap has narrowed—about 40 percent of the test-score gap has been eliminated. Black post-secondary attainment lags far behind whites' but here too there has been substantial progress: 15 percent of young black adults, twenty-five to twenty-nine years old, are now college graduates, for example, compared to 26 percent of young whites. While in some important ways American society has not desegregated, and while income distribution within the black community and in the broader society has become less equal, there is now a black middle class (no longer only undertakers and ministers in black ghettos) that has been well prepared by public educational institutions. Thus, although there is a long journey ahead, there is also a long journey com-

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pleted. We are ill prepared to conduct the former if we pretend the latter never took place.

Graubard acknowledges these truths, but then makes a breathtaking admission: "Reform-minded educators," he says, meaning "open school" advocates like himself, when "applying for grants or writing about their nontraditional ideas and methods . . . trimmed their real beliefs, making claims about increased achievement or reduced dropout rates, noting that their target populations were those students who were not being successful in the regular system. But among themselves, they would affirm what progressive school reformers have always taught: that the quality of the school experience . . . would be better supported in the alternative schools and that traditional schooling was often detrimental to the growth of [qualities like curiosity] even among students who were quite successful by conventional standards."

So "alternative school" advocates have deliberately and consciously maligned the academic achievement of public schools, in the vain hope that by doing so these "reformers" could attract support from those (like minority parents) whose goals were to boost the conventionally defined academic achievement of their children. Minority and lower-income parents understand that their children's access to middle-class jobs depends on the acquisition of credentials that reflect minimal demonstrated competence in academic pursuits. These parents (or liberal foundations supporting their goals) would not likely be attracted to schools whose performance, Graubard asserts, can't be measured by statistics. In effect, Graubard suggests, the alternative school movement told these parents that alternative schools produce better measured outcomes, even though the school's true goal is only to give children a higher quality experience.

However, rather than mobilize any significant minority adherence to "alternative" education, the drumbeat of undeserved attacks on public schools has undermined the support even of those minority families whose futures are most dependent on the health of public institutions. Ironically, one beneficiary of this loss of minority support has been the Catholic system, where instruction is even more "traditional" than in public schools, but which now eagerly volunteers to accept vouchers from minority parents seeking to escape "failing" public education.

In 1983, on the heels of a period of remarkable school improvement for black youth, a *New York Times* poll found that only 34 percent of blacks felt that the public schools were better than in the previous generation. (To which Vernon Jordan properly exclaimed: "Objectively, that's wrong. The child in the worst ghetto is getting a better education than I got in Daisy Allen High School in Atlanta. We only had one Bunsen burner and that only worked on Thursdays.") I don't suggest that this perversion of public attitude is solely, or even primarily, the fault of the opportunism of the "progressive" open-school movement. But while conservatives (such as William Bennett or Chester Finn) have been effective advocates, it would also be wrong to minimize the roles of Charles Silberman and other more contemporary alternative educators with whom Allen Graubard identifies.

It is too easy for Graubard to misinterpret my defense of public education as disagreement with the pedagogical tradition originally inspired by John Dewey. Unlike the proponents of the 1960s alternative "open school" movement, Dewey and his followers at Columbia Teachers College were fully engaged in regular public schools and always accepted the challenge of incorporating child-centered curricular methods into mass educational institutions, recognizing that this would require compromise with traditional school goals. Their mission was not to establish separate institutions that only like-minded "progressive" parents would "choose" to support, but rather to propagandize the educational establishment in schools across the country, hoping to see child-centered progressive instructional methods spread. When Dewey's followers did establish separate "lab" schools, the purpose was to propagandize, not to isolate. Graubard's attempt to appropriate this tradition for the exclusive use of today's public-school critics is unfortunate. Today's public schools are not uniformly the antithesis of progressive education. Part of the

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success of public schools in the last generation is undoubtedly attributable to their adoption of progressive pedagogies. Thus, conservatives busily promote a "back to basics" movement of phonics and drilled memorization of arithmetic algorithms, as they attack the Deweyan (now called "constructivist") pedagogies that heavily influence the public schools' teaching of reading, math, and social studies. The furious debates in Congress around national standards reflect the continued saliency of these conflicts. Contrary to Graubard's claim, we do know how to assess, to some degree, creativity, "skeptical questioning," and emotional aspects of the learning process, which is precisely why conservatives are so opposed to national tests—they believe these tests reward educational methods that promote such democratic qualities. Certainly, standardized tests do assess the lower order skills as well, and perhaps still to too great an extent. But progressive influence within public education has led to an emphasis in testing on "open-ended" or "free response" questions, "authentic assessment," self-expression, inventive approaches to math word problems, and so on, as well as to a demand that standardized testing should be predicated on all children having "an opportunity to learn" the material being assessed. Conservatives fantasize that John Dewey is hiding in the Clinton White House, ready to emerge and corrupt American youth if given the slightest opportunity. But alternative educators like Allen Graubard are unable to come to progressivism's defense in this debate because they are now trapped holding a caricature of American schools that, apparently, they initially proposed to win foundation grants.

There are certainly many awful public schools today. There are also many awful classrooms in otherwise good public schools, and some inspiring classrooms in otherwise awful public schools. Notwithstanding the undeniable gains in academic achievement and equality posted in the last generation, there is unlimited opportunity for those who wish to invest reform energy in conventional public schools, rather than withdraw. No matter how much energy we invest, however, we cannot eradicate poverty and economic inequality with a better pedagogy, however inspired it may be. For these purposes, a broader political and economic reform agenda is required. On this, I hope, Graubard and I can agree.

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Allen Graubard Responds to the Reply

I AM SORRY that Richard Rothstein has chosen not to respond to my main points: that the public school system continues its "tracking" functions; that public high schools are typically authoritarian and alienating; that the vision of progressive education has not penetrated deeply into the system—though there are many teachers, parents, and students who would want to live out that vision; that there are small school programs that embody such a vision; that choice for parents and students within the public system would support more progressive reform; and that tests for basic skills are not sufficient for judging the educational experience. Rothstein still maintains that the public school system is so successful in its current form and content that no choice should be allowed, that teachers should not be supported in planning and running their own programs, that the radical critique of traditional schooling (from John Dewey to Paul Goodman to contemporary educators like Deborah Meier) has no basis. And I continue to disagree with each of these points.

But instead of arguing about these big issues, Rothstein uses his space to misrepresent what reformers did twenty-five years ago—on the basis of a single remark in my article. He claims that reformers "deliberately and consciously maligned the academic achievement of public schools" and cynically promised to help "disadvantaged" minority students in order to get foundation grants. In fact, we de-

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scribed the achievements of public schools circa 1970 exactly as Rothstein does today when he claims that vast improvements have occurred since then. And the programs we recommended have helped minority students wherever they have been implemented—in important and measurable ways, like improved attendance, better attitudes toward learning, greater self-confidence, greater ability to work cooperatively, higher graduation and college entrance rates, and so on. I can provide data showing how the programs succeeded in these ways. I am more cautious, however, about claiming that Scholastic Aptitude Test scores have risen or will rise significantly in the short time disadvantaged students are likely to spend in such programs—which was part of the point of repeating Christopher Jencks's argument about the importance of the experience itself.

Even profound criticism of the way a school system actually works and the harm it causes to many of its students is consistent with a commitment to work inside that system for change, even for radical change. Dewey never softened his critique of the traditional forms of education, nor did Paul Goodman; but they both supported teachers and others who committed themselves to public education as a democratic ideal.

To end on a personal note, even at the height of the free-school movement, I urged radical educators to work in the public schools, as difficult as that task might be. And for the past several years, I have been teaching in inner-city public high schools, trying to create, institutionalize, and then multiply the small progressive programs I described in my article, and I find comrades with this perspective all over the country. We do not believe that there is any contradiction between our critical perspective and daily work in public schools. Nor does this perspective make us allies of malevolent right-wing forces that aim to privatize major segments of American education.

Richard Rothstein Answers the Response

MUCH THAT Allen Graubard writes would be fair if stated with less exaggeration: of course, public schools continue to track (although less than before); many (not all) high schools are authoritarian (though there's variety within schools); basic skills tests are insufficient (but standardized tests are now more "open-ended"), and so on.

Policy entails trade-offs. It's not simply good vs. evil. Achieving one progressive goal may make achieving others difficult. I'm especially concerned with Graubard's claim that "choice for parents and students within the public system would support more progressive reform."

Choice *would* support more fully progressive schools, but would also segregate (by race, class, ideology, culture). That's why progressives who toy with public choice programs find it necessary to restrict them: imposing race/ethnic quotas, giving preference to students from designated neighborhoods, *requiring* all parents to designate choices, soliciting students from underrepresented groups, and so on. In fact, these programs are not what conservative choice-advocates have in mind, so it can be irresponsible for progressives to promote "choice" when it's certain to be misinterpreted.

I applaud Graubard's advocacy of progressive reform within regular public schools. But this has not been the consistent message of "alternative school" advocates whose viewpoint Graubard promotes. As he makes clear, the "alternative school" movement began as a withdrawal to the private domain. Today, "charters" and choice make essentially private endeavors available within the public system. As Graubard put it in his 1972 book, *Free the Children*:

> Many experimental alternative schools within the public school system are now beginning. . . . However, they are necessarily enmeshed in the public school bureaucracy and are under various constraints and pressures because of this. In the private free schools (the subject of this book) one finds a situation of real independence. These in-

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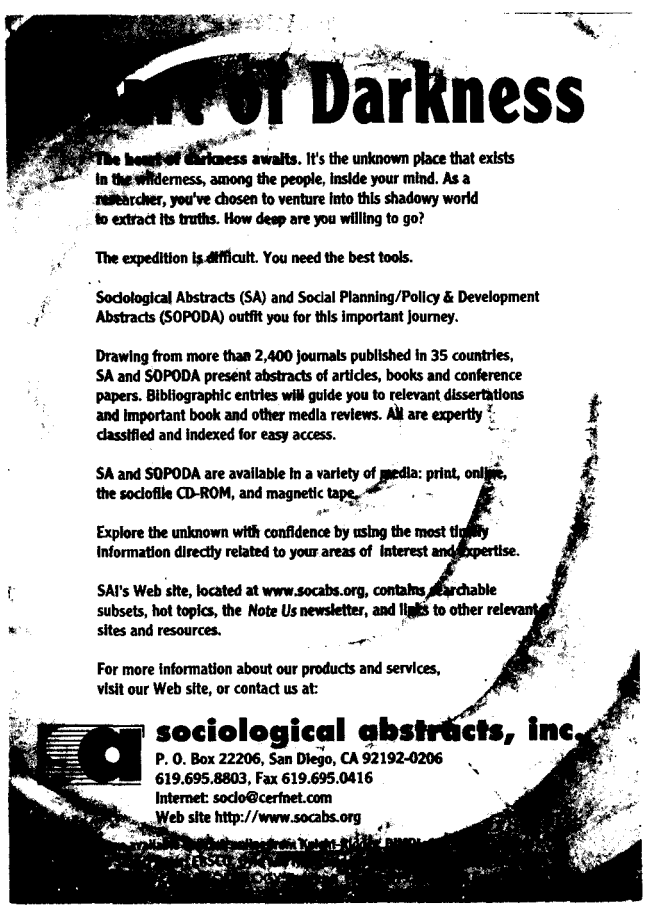
stitutions are built by people who have not asked educational "experts" to design or approve an "experimental program," people who have not waited for the educational professionals to form committees and study groups to evaluate by "cost-benefit" analysis the most efficient and realistic technique of reform.

This contemptuous view of public accountability is identical to words heard today from conservative opponents of all public institutions. It has not been "alternative school" reformers' intent to make common cause with antidemocratic reactionaries. But to avoid being misused, progressives should repudiate the antipublic rhetoric that has been part of their critique. (The innuendo crops up, for example, in Graubard's characterization of my viewpoint as "approval of . . . public school bureaucracies [including the teachers' unions]).")

To advocate progressive reform within public schools while resisting efforts to destroy the public realm, reformers need to do more than create pockets of creativity that students can choose—even if these alternatives are now publicly funded. Progressives need to focus on incremental reforms taking place in regular schools. They need to acknowledge that public-school reform is not only possible, but has proceeded in dramatic fashion over the last quarter century. There is now a fierce national debate about whether progressive ideas (like authentic and open-ended assessment, "opportunity to learn" standards, multicultural history standards, "constructivist" literacy, and new math) should be permitted and even funded in regular public schools. I again urge Graubard and his allies to join in this debate, but they can't do so by claiming that public education produces nothing but evil except in alternative locations. ●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The Communist Manifesto at 150

Shlomo Avineri

ONE HUNDRED fifty years after its publication, and almost a decade after the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, can something still be learned from *The Communist Manifesto*?

The *Manifesto* is perhaps the most unabashedly rhetorical and flamboyant of Marx and Engels's writings. At the same time, it is a theoretical tract of impressive richness, expressing a closely argued philosophy of history. It abounds with resonant phrases: "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle," "The bourgeoisie produces, above all, its own grave-diggers," "The proletarians do not have a homeland," "The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains," "Working men of all countries, unite!" These are among the most memorable political quotes ever used and abused; they gained an almost liturgical status and were sometimes reiterated ad nauseam by commissars and political hacks with no real grasp of their meaning or historical significance.

The *Manifesto* has also been worshiped by some of the best minds of the European and American intelligentsia. They often seemed so mesmerized by its prophetic cadences that they were unable to peer beyond the looking glass and see the horrors of Soviet reality and Stalinist repression. The beguiling moral certitudes of the *Manifesto*'s lofty rhetoric sometimes served as a shield against reality. What was intended to be a key to the hieroglyph of history became just another instrument in the hands of oligarchs seeking to defend their own privileges.

Yet there is much more to the *Manifesto* than this. First and foremost, and perhaps most paradoxically, is its insight into the radically transformative nature of modern capitalism. In the first chapter of the *Manifesto* ("Bourgeois and Proletarians") Marx and Engels demonstrate a remarkable understanding of the permanent revolution immanent in the dynamics of what they called the capitalist mode of production. When many of capitalism's champions had not yet understood its full historical import, and when most of its socialist critics still saw industrial capitalism as a monster just to be slain, Marx and Engels, developing with much greater nuance the claims made first by the Saint-Simonians, pointed to the unprecedented way in which human creative capacities could be unleashed by capitalism. Capitalism, they argued, must first be adopted, and then, dialectically, must become the object of criticism—and then it must be transcended, *aufgehoben*, in a truly Hegelian sense. Without industrial capitalism, there could be no socialism.

IN MARX and Engels's view, capitalism unleashes a revolution with which it cannot cope: like the sorcerer's apprentice, it needs a guiding rational hand that can channel its forces toward their *telos*. The contradictions of capitalism (another phrase to be much abused by epigoni) were revealed in its self-destructive nature, and would lead ultimately to a socialized mode of production.

Few analysts in the mid-nineteenth century were as perceptive as Marx and Engels about the fundamental difference between industrial capitalism and all previous forms of production. Industrial capitalism, they argued, was not just a quantitatively more developed form of production; it was qualitatively different, because it created for the first time in history a universal market as well as a universal culture. In the late 1990s, when "globalization" appears as if it were a novel phenomenon, it is worth recalling their actual words:

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> The bourgeoisie . . . has created more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations together. Subjection of nature's forces to man, machinery, application of chemistry to industry and agriculture, steam navigation, railways, electric telegraphs, clearing of whole continents for cultivation, canalization of rivers, whole populations conjured out of the ground—what earlier century had even a presentiment that such productive forces slumbered in the lap of social labor?

Or:

> The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society. Conservation of the old modes of production in unaltered form was, on the contrary, the first condition of existence for all earlier industrial classes. Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new forms become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into the air, all that is holy is profaned.

And finally:

> The bourgeoisie . . . draws all, even the most barbarian nations into civilization . . . it compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production . . . In one word, it creates a world after its own image. . . . And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures there emerges a world literature.

In the universalizing nature of capitalism Marx finds the historical instrument by which the universalist vision of the Enlightenment might be realized; and he also finds the means for creating the material conditions required by the forthcoming socialist epoch.

The world today is dramatically different from that described in the *Manifesto;* yet this is an outcome of the transformative nature of capitalism and the industrial revolution that Marx and Engels described. But while they were among the first to appreciate capitalism's immanent radicalism, they were obviously wrong when they asserted that as capitalism developed, its social tensions would grow more extreme and its classes more polarized. Almost the precise opposite came to pass. The more capitalism developed, the more its class distinctions were attenuated; new middle classes emerged, as did professional workers, and wide sectors of the traditional working class underwent *embourgeoisement*. History disproved Marx's almost Manichaean vision of brutalized and alienated workers confronting a small and shrinking capitalist class. It was only in non- or underindustrialized countries that radical social polarization became the norm.

PART OF the problem was epistemological: while Marx and Engels spoke of capitalism "constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production," they conceived this in a linear way. Industrial society as they knew it was dependent largely on machinery that was powered by steam derived from burning coal. This became the only conceivable industrial society for them. They failed to imagine its supersession by another type of industrial society, one that was different in kind because it was based on other sources of energy and technology.

In this way, Marx and Engels limited their own vision and thus their ability to imagine technological and social alternatives. Of course one cannot cavil with them for not foreseeing the consequences of electrical power or the invention of computers (which demand a completely different kind of worker—educated, literate, and sophisticated—than that required by nineteenth-century machinery). Still, Marx and Engels can be criticized for not projecting beyond a linear development of technology—for failing to anticipate that instead of machines just becoming bigger and more efficient, there would also be qualitative changes

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and, corresponding with them, new and different kinds of social structure. In describing future industrial development in purely quantitative terms, Marx and Engels thus failed to draw out the implications of their own insight that capitalism is inherently restless and driven to innovate. For all their critical prowess, Marx and Engels were children of their own time.

Still, although polarization did not, as a rule, take place *within* advanced industrial societies as Marx and Engels predicted, something quite like it did occur on the global level: the widening gap between industrialized and less-industrialized lands is a consequence of the very integration of the latter into the globalized economy. Third world populations have become integral parts of a world market, as both (low-paid) producers and consumers. Instead of an internal polarization between capitalists and proletarians there is an external one between "capitalist" and "proletarian" nations.

So polarization has been exported from and universalized by the industrialized nations. If Marx and Engels's analyses are mostly invalid for the advanced nations today, they have been vindicated by the facts of globalization—the sweatshops of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, with their child labor, their horrendously unsanitary working and living conditions, and their lack of minimum-wage laws and basic social welfare networks. Here, then, are the successors of the sweatshops of London's East End or New York's Lower East Side. And conditions in some postcommunist societies, especially Russia, do resemble those of the early, wild capitalism of nineteenth-century Europe.

Capitalism's Fate

Marx and Engels's prognoses about the role of the state in capitalism's social development also proved to be short-sighted. When they declared that "the proletarians do not have a homeland," they had in mind societies in which the working class was totally alienated from existing political institutions. One should recall that when the *Manifesto* was written there was no universal suffrage in Europe: where there were parliamentary institutions the franchise belonged to a very restricted—well-to-do—part of the population. This is the real source of Marx and Engels's scathing criticism of parliaments and their contempt for "representative" institutions that were in fact nothing more than "the executive committee of the exploiting classes."

But today's Western democracies have little in common with those societies: Europe and North America have undergone a radical transformation—one that has allowed a greater integration of the working class into political and economic structures. There is again a paradox involved, if we turn back to the analyses provided by *The Communist Manifesto*. By the end of the nineteenth century universal male suffrage became the general rule in most Western capitalist societies. The proletariat no longer stood outside the political realm, and most parties were forced to incorporate at least some socialist demands into their programs, as they had to compete with strong socialist parties that emerged across Western Europe. Half a century after the *Manifesto* was written, one could no longer maintain that workers were totally alienated from and impotent in the face of the established political structure. By 1900, "the proletarians do not have a homeland" was sounding more and more like a hollow phrase.

THE STATE described in the *Manifesto* was early capitalism's minimalist state; it refrained as much as possible from interfering in economic and social affairs and, more or less, followed Adam Smith's principle of laissez-faire.* This "night watchman state" (as Lassalle later called it) could rightly be characterized as little more than the political expression of the dominant class's economic interests; after all, the commercial class thought any state interference in the "free" operation of the market to be against its own interests.

Yet it was capitalist development itself that compelled the state to intervene increasingly in social and economic life. This may have started with minimal, humanitarian legislation to alleviate some of the more horrendous traits of early industrialization; but later, the need to blunt socialist criticisms and counter the

*Marx knew, of course, that historical reality was much more complicated than the model. See his nuanced descriptions of the state in *The Eighteenth Brumaire* and *The Civil War in France*.

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power of unionized labor led to the slow introduction of forms of medical and social insurance that not only curtailed the absolutism of market forces but expanded the state's role as a protector of workers. The growth of trade unions further increased the participation of workers in social and political life. After the crash of 1929—which bore out Marx's predictions about the cyclical crises of capitalism—Keynesianism turned the Western capitalist state into the major regulator of economic life. It was a defensive measure, and it successfully prevented cyclical crises from becoming structural crises that would threaten the very existence of capitalism. In the meantime, expanding social legislation gave to widening sectors of the working class a stake in the system as a whole.

On the most elementary level, these developments proved Marx's predictions wrong: capitalism turned out to be resilient and did not collapse. On another level, however, Marx appears to have been prescient: laissez-faire capitalism could not survive and state intervention was necessary. It was precisely those who were out to prevent capitalist collapse—the Keynesians—who had to recognize the accuracy of Marx's claims. But he was wrong to assume that the only form of capitalism was laissez-faire, and that the only alternative was therefore a proletarian revolution. A much less radical cure was beyond his horizons.

In this context, it is interesting to look at the "Ten Regulations" proposed by Marx and Engels in Chapter Two of the *Manifesto*. These were measures to initiate the transition from capitalism to socialism, and they are among the few policy proposals Marx ever made for a coming socialist revolution. Many of them have been carried out, albeit in attenuated form, by the twentieth-century welfare state. They include progressive income taxation, the creation of a central bank, nationalization of the means of transportation, public works, the creation of a public industrial sector, and the limitation of the right of inheritance. All these measures as advocated by Marx were aimed at the transformation, over time, of a capitalist into a socialist mode of production. What evolved instead, by trial and error in most Western industrial societies, was a reformed capitalism.

The National Question

There is another aspect of the *Manifesto*'s historical analysis that was quite wrong, although here its authors were in good company: its understanding of nationalism.

Like most people influenced by Enlightenment universalism, Marx and Engels viewed nationalism as a premodern form of particularism; it would, they thought, disappear under the globalizing impact of capitalism. Socialism would thus inherit a postnational world. After the revolutions of 1848–1849 Marx and Engels modified their views and judged that the attempts for Italian and German unification were necessary for the capitalist and eventual socialist development of those countries. But by and large, nationalism remained for Marx and Engels a retrograde phenomenon.

Marxism shared this disregard for the historical power of nationalism with liberalism, which, from Mill to Rawls, has had little to say about it. This is why both Marxists and liberals usually underestimated nationalism's appeal and miscalculated its consequences. And both also failed to distinguish between liberal, universalist, and harmonistic nationalisms (like Mazzini's, for example) and the exclusivist, aggressive, and xenophobic versions (Treitschke's, for example).

It was left to a number of later socialist thinkers, mainly those who had to confront national issues in multi-ethnic empires, to try to integrate at least the cultural aspect of nationalism—identity, the sense of community—into a universalist vision of socialism: Otto Bauer and Karl Renner in Austria, Jhordania in Georgia, the Bundists as well as Zionist socialists like Moses Hess, Ber Borokhov, and Chaim Arlosoroff in the Jewish context. Still, the blind spot of mainstream Marxism when it came to nationalism remained a major weakness of socialist movements. In 1919 Arlosoroff, the Zionist socialist thinker, pointed out the failure of the reconstituted postwar Socialist International to address adequately the cultural aspects of nationalism. He warned

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that this failure might create circumstances in which many working people would look elsewhere to express cultural identity, and that this might overwhelm the socialist movement. These were prophetic words.

Alchemists of Revolution

Last and not least is the question of Russia. It has sometimes been pointed out that Marx and Engels expected socialist revolution to break out first in the more industrialized nations, where the "inner contradictions" of capitalism were most pronounced. Therefore, it is argued, a socialist revolution in Russia was contrary to Marx's own historical analysis.

Again, the picture is more complex. Toward the end of the *Manifesto*, in a passage overlooked by many commentators, Marx and Engels entertain the possibility of revolution breaking out first in less-industrialized Germany. In latecomers to capitalism, they suggest, some developments are hastened and hence more acute. In their words:

> The communists turn their attention chiefly to Germany, because that country is on the eve of a bourgeois revolution that is bound to be carried out under more advanced conditions of European civilization, and with a much more developed proletariat, than that of England in the seventeenth and of France in the eighteenth century, and because the bourgeois revolution in Germany will be but a prelude to an immediately following proletarian revolution.

Also, in the introduction to the 1882 Russian translation of the *Manifesto*, Marx and Engels suggested that a revolution was now possible in Russia, which had by then undergone the initial stages of capitalist development. They qualified this by adding that it would succeed only if the Russian Revolution became "a signal for the proletarian revolution in the West."

Here lies the rub: the point is not where the revolution breaks out first. Rather it is that the whole concept of revolution in Marx is premised on universality. It can begin in less-developed Russia, but there can be no "Socialism in One Country" there or anywhere else.

This was ultimately the tragedy of the Bolshevik Revolution. To suppose that an underdeveloped country devastated by war, with little industry, a weak bourgeoisie, a small proletariat, and hardly any of the "superstructural" elements of a bourgeois society (representative institutions, a civil society, freedom of the press, and so on) could, single-handedly and without a parallel revolution in the West, attain socialist goals, is entirely outside the framework of ideas enunciated in the *Manifesto*. Any Marxist analysis would have to conclude that an effort to build a socialist society in isolated revolutionary Russia after 1917 was doomed from the start.

THUS WHAT was born as a universalist, emancipatory message became by necessity (and not just because of any personal traits of Lenin or Stalin) an oppressive system. It was born of the misguided attempt to create by force a new reality out of a society without any basis for socialism. The horrors of forced collectivization and the Gulag were the consequences. So the failure of communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe was unavoidable. What failed there was not the Marxian vision but the attempt to realize it under conditions that were totally contrary to the presuppositions of *The Communist Manifesto* itself. Marx once called some of the more radical elements in his own League of Communists "alchemists of the revolution" because they attempted "to carry out a revolution without the conditions of the revolution." The Soviet Union was such an attempt at revolutionary alchemy, with the predictable murderous results.

The West is another story. The revolution, of course, did not break out there. Does this demonstrate the shortcomings of the Marxist analysis? Or was the *Manifesto* one of history's most glaring examples of self-falsifying prophecy? The jury may still be out in ways more complex than articulated either by supporters or opponents of Marx. ●

SHLOMO AVINERI teaches political science at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and was recently awarded the Israel Prize, the country's highest civilian decoration.

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Called for Theater Duty

Thomas Geoghegan

THERE'S SOMETHING odd about living in a city of three million (and not having it be New York). What's odd is this: live theater. Chicago has pages of it. Maybe a third as much as New York's, often at a quarter the price. Sometimes, astounding plays for ten dollars. In a way, it's closer to London than New York: cheap, and although much of it is bad, there's enough good to keep anyone frustrated all year long.

And what annoys me beyond reason, and makes me grieve for my city, and fume at the people in Bistrot Zinc and the Asian noodle shops, is:

No one goes.

Or not to the off-Loop ten-dollar stuff that I love. Even if it's the rave in the *Reader*, the free weekly.

OK, I exaggerate. Some nights, ten people will be there.

This, more than the decline of the voting rate, the growth of inequality . . . this civic disaster is what makes me sick. Sick. I see it as a test of our citizenship.

Not just the city's, but America's, because this is America's greatest city. (New York, being a metropolis, doesn't count as a city.)

But what makes it worse, or stranger, is that I, too, like the people in the trattorias, hate the theater. I'd much rather sit in a restaurant like Bistrot Zinc.

What better theater anyway than a Chicago restaurant, with two busboys circling the table and trying to take my plate when there's a single strand of asparagus left? There's drama enough . . . indeed, I'm part of it.

So why do I go? I suppose I go to seethe that no one else is going. If I can find someone to go with and seethe to.

The other night I turned to a tearful B. during *Emily's Child*, a play about a Down-syndrome baby, dying, and I said,

"We're the youngest here."

Except for the baby.

"Yes," she whispered.

Why isn't anyone here? Even when I go to Steppenwolf, which was founded by John Malkovich, and which is Chicago's "kick-ass," rock-and-roll theater, why is it that out in the seats they're older than the College of Cardinals? The ushers could hand us red hats when they seat us.

How can we be citizens and not see plays? I don't mean we should go to the plays they put on at the University of Chicago. My God, what is playing down there but the *Oresteia*?

The last time I went it was *Agamemnon*, and I'm haunted by how my companion, Cassandra-like, froze at the door and wouldn't go in, as if she could foresee that there might be a pop quiz. She stood there, crying, and I had to drag her.

Sure enough, when Agamemnon fell dead, someone popped up to lead a discussion.

Once in, I feel trapped. Like with panhandlers in subway cars. Only I can't change cars at the next stop. So why pay even ten dollars to get the same sense of civic panic as in the subway?

It's not like a film, which is just a flickering of light. There is a real human being screaming in front of me, and I feel like I'm expected to *do* something. They're screaming, like they scream in the lobby of our law firm.

Denise, the secretary, says: "Can you please go out and *talk to him*?" Everyone is looking at me, I'm the lawyer. Make him go away! Someone who's lost a pension or been fired from a job. I get Willy Loman at the office.

And there's no chance for a fantasy life in a play. Even the film stars, up close, on a live

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stage . . . they don't look so good. They're puffy, etc. It's odd how plays used to shock the Puritans . . . now, in an age of movies, it's only the Puritans who can bear to go.

Also, I'm at the age when there's a darkness about intermission. I hate the idea of a "second act."

Ages ago I would quote F. Scott Fitzgerald: "There are no second acts in American life." Now I think: if only that were true! Did Fitzgerald ever see a second act? A poor wretch up there on stage . . . and something coming on, and on, and the man or woman is up there, saying over and over, "I can't move!"

And now that I'm near fifty, I see, oh, only too clearly, how there is, in fact, going to be a second act.

And that's why, when the lights flash, and I still haven't got my Coke, it's only the old who come back from intermission. They've *been* in their own private second act for years.

YET I THINK, somehow, in our time, it's the first duty of a citizen to see a play. Doesn't Aristotle say that somewhere? It's especially important in a city. A few of us, single, are still trapped here, with our suburb-nesting clocks ticking and the first act of our lives really over. There's the trapped feeling of the theater in our public life: the growing gap of rich and poor. Something terrible is coming toward us, even as the city blossoms like a garden, but for some reason we can't leave.

Yet how do we justify our staying on? "Oh I love the city, with all the theater . . . ."

But even at ten dollars a ticket, no one is in the seats.

Maybe it's the plays. More about Thatcher England than Clinton America. Shouldn't theater now be about our growing gap of rich and poor? But there's nothing. Not a word. If Shaw or Brecht were alive now (let's put aside Odets), wouldn't they be writing about this?

So I waited, and because waiting in the theater leads to madness, I thought one day, "I'll write a play."

A friend tried to talk me out of it. "It's the hardest writing, it's impossible."

Another friend said, "Look, even if you do write one, why would you? If you want to reach people do a movie. Or a novel. Even a public-policy book. You might still reach a few thousand. But a play? How many see a play?"

Three people on a Sunday night. It's crazy! Besides, those were the three who knew about the growing gap of rich and poor.

Then one midnight . . . I did it. Now I was frightened. I asked a friend, "How much would it cost to get this thing produced?"

"Off Loop?"

"Yes."

"Simple, bare-bones?"

"Yes."

"Oh . . . eighty thousand."

I remember gasping, "Dollars?"

Here are the expenses: Director. House manager. Lighting designer. Electrician. Six actors (non-Equity, but $250 a week). Radio. Newspaper. I'll stop. I'm only halfway through.

And backers? You have to tell people, like a Miranda warning: "Don't do this unless you're prepared to lose *every cent*." Not fifty cents on a dollar: the whole dollar.

So guess what? There are no producers. Light years of unread plays to photocopy at Kinko's, but no one to produce them. In my search, I heard of only one, a young woman, age twenty-six, who had produced (some said) at least two plays.

"But isn't she young?"

"Young? She's too old!" Most don't last that long. Sure enough, she didn't return my calls.

I used to do the numbers . . . twenty dollars a ticket: dream on! Fifty people a night: that's crazy!

And even if all that happened, our losses would be greater than the French Army's at Verdun. So how do people do it?

They put them on for twenty thousand dollars. No one ever hears of them or can find them, since they're in basements, with rats. I worry about really being trapped, and it won't even be the second act.

I did have two "readings."

July 1996. The night before, we do a read through and I worry about the actor who's playing "me." Do people think I'm like that?

B. and I go to dinner. "I had to laugh," she says, "the way you looked at the guy who's playing 'you.' "

"Hey! It's not autobiographical!"

She laughs.

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"It's . . . I just don't think he's right."

The next day people laugh. But it's not a comedy. Under anesthetic, I'm winched up on stage and told there'll be questions.

The MC says: "You! *Say nothing!*"

Were there questions? I blanked out. There are no third acts in American life.

December 1996. A reading for "backers."

Still no producer.

New cast. I'm too embarrassed to ask the old one. Here we are, in a new space.

There's a sign: "Quiet/Rehearsal: *The Seagull*."

And another sign: "Warning/This Play Has Frontal Nudity" (another play, not Chekhov's).

It's Christmas time, so no one comes. My big idea was a buffet: lavish food for all the backers. But the actors show up first. To my horror, they begin eating the food.

"Aren't you sweet to have thought of *us*!" (An actress: N.)

What can I say? I'm not paying them. "They don't expect it," someone says.

No one laughs. Maybe because we're asking for money. "It's a dark play," a friend says.

It's . . . a comedy!

A man who is a stand-up comic says: "I'll tell you why no one laughed, you forgot to turn out the lights."

"So?"

"People only laugh in the dark."

That night I went home. Flipped out the lights, though I was in no mood to laugh. Why did I write about falling wages? I'd never get this show on.

But the next week I got calls.

"Who was *she*?"

"Where did you get *her*?"

N., they meant.

I'd say, "What did you think of the play?"

Long pause. "Who was *she*?"

My friends were shocked that I didn't tape it. Didn't tape it? Why not? I could play it on my VCR alone at night, when I stagger home after spending thirty dollars at a bistro. Alone! Only, isn't the whole point of a play not to sit and hit rewind?

The whole point is the sadness, the great sadness, that I can never see N., or the rest of them, reciting again.

It's sad even with the lights off, it's sadder with the lights on. It's sad to think . . . *no one is taping it!*

There's no net. Just three or four people to hold it in mind a few more days. This eerie sense that all of it is perishing, unrewindably, right before our eyes.

Since my own perishing, I now try, like a good citizen, to see more plays as they flicker out.

Yes, more than ever, I feel it's my duty as a citizen. The other night I went, as a volunteer, to see a Caryl Churchill play, *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*. She took the debates of the English Civil War, the famous Putney Army debate of the 1640s, and put them on stage.

As in: Should Englishmen, by virtue of being born, have the right to vote?

A friend, Julia, phoned and said, "I just went, it's great, and only three or four people are there. It's your *duty* to go there, now!"

I phoned Larry. "Julia says it's our duty," etc.

It was the best play I'd seen in years. Soldiers argued. Women wept. Babies abandoned on the sides of roads, all because Christ had not come and people had no right to vote.

"It's great!" I whispered.

"Well," Larry whispered, "does this make me feel great about theater, or does it make me despair?"

Why did we even whisper? No one else was there.

FOR ME, theater should be political. "Wait," my friends say, "you have to be a poet, and argue both sides." So, for example:

It's wrong to eat babies.

On the other hand, they're hormone-free.

OK, no politics. But the problem is that there is something dark and archaic about the theater, and it's not human sacrifice. It's the idea of voting. We don't like to vote any more. In the *Oresteia* one is actually on the jury and, in the end, deciding Orestes's fate. Who wants jury duty?

There's a story about the Hungarian playwright Ferenc Molnár. A boulevardier, he's out every night, with actresses, smoking. Then one day from City Hall he gets a summons:

Jury duty, 7:30 AM, next Monday.

"What?" he says. "I've never been up at

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seven in my life!"

But the day comes, and his friends pull him into the streets, and Molnar blinks, looks at the trams, the crowds.

"My God! All these people have jury duty?"

And that's what I think when I go out at night and see all the people in the restaurants. Don't these people have theater duty?

I want to go into Bistrot Zinc, the pan-Asian noodle shops. "What are you doing here? Don't you have theater duty?"

Frightening to see that even London has trattorias, just as if it were a world city like Chicago. These will be the true enemies of the London stage. Give up the British pound? Fine. But never give up British food. That's why the theater over there still survives.

Four-star food is choking our theater. It might be too late to tell people, "Get up from the table. Go to the theater."

Somewhere, an actress is perishing tonight. Isn't it a duty, for each of these deaths, that some of us in the cities come out and see? ●

THOMAS GEOGHEGAN is a lawyer and the author of *Which Side Are You On?*

David Glenn

Surplus Meaning in Brooklyn

A FEW YEARS ago, it was revealed that the Southern Baptist Convention had compiled elaborate demographic maps of the United States. The maps displayed painstakingly calculated estimates of the number of citizens in each state who had been saved (46.1 percent in Alabama, for example) and also the number who would burn eternally in a lake of fire. It's hard to imagine a more ludicrous press release, or a more offensive one—and yet something about the Baptists' exercise struck a chord in me.

When I was ten years old and actively attending two Presbyterian churches, I would wander the streets of Lexington, Virginia, studying the progress of the Christian project. The older boys smoking in the 76 station lot: had they committed more sins today than yesterday, or fewer? Did the decrepit church up by the middle school save any souls? And what about the mountains outside of town? Of course God intended their beauty to impart some kind of ethical message—but what?

I'm sure that if it had occurred to me to create a statistical map of the saved and the damned in each Lexington neighborhood, I would have slaved over it for weeks. But I didn't take satisfaction (at least not consciously) at the thought of my neighbors consumed by hellfire. On the contrary: my walks around town were filled with optimistic daydreams of mass conversions. I pictured everyone in town spontaneously gathering on Main Street carrying Bibles and flowers. After that day, my friend Martin would stop using swear words; Randy Carlson and his cousin would stop tripping and kicking me at recess; I would no longer be too lazy to finish my math homework.

My religious belief didn't survive the sixth grade, but certain habits of mind have lingered. Five years later, in Ohio, I was part of a high school students' anti-apartheid coalition. At meetings of this group I was the sober, *New Republic*-reading goody-goody; I'd quarrel about rhetoric and tactics with the Trotskyist and Maoist kids. But at demonstrations, or even just driving home through the Cleveland ghetto on gray Saturday afternoons, I'd have hopeful visions of insurrection that must have been at least as romantic and bloody as any of my friends'. Every one of the city's physical features—the rotting steel mills, the weed-grown lots on the East Side, the strip malls on Lorain Avenue—promised social cataclysm. The survivors of this apocalypse, I imagined, would never dream of shirking their obligations to the dispossessed, or of watching *Monday Night Football*. The world would be ethically and aesthetically cleansed. Cleveland would

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be a multiracial Stockholm; everyone would spend their evenings reading and debating modernist fiction.

And even today, I have a running joke with certain friends. When the conversation turns to the villainy of, say, Nike or McDonald's, one of us will smile knowingly and say, "Of course, someday McDonald's will be a socialist-feminist collective." I'm not sure why this shtick seems funny—because it mocks radical jargon? because it mocks our weakness? But the thing about this joke is: in a certain corner of my mind, I actually *believe* it.

In real life, my politics are—at least I hope—not so fatuous. I can recite Isaiah Berlin's anti-utopian arguments about the incompatibility of human goods. I can tell you about Richard Rorty's case against progressivism and teleological thought. I spend weekends poring over *Critical Review* and diagramming arguments among Hayekians, communitarians, and democratic socialists. And yet my gut is still drawn toward a puerile eschatology: I want history to have a direction, and I want human society to change thoroughly and magically.

THIS PAST October, my friend Kate and I volunteered to help conduct a symbolic election among workfare participants in New York City. The city's Work Experience Program (WEP) now requires more than forty thousand welfare recipients, many of them parents of small children, to work for their benefits by performing menial tasks in city hospitals and parks. Needless to say, this is not the great public works program that liberals have dreamed of: WEP workers "earn," in effect, far less than the minimum wage. And Mayor Rudolph Giuliani insists that they don't count as employees under federal and state law, and therefore have no right to bargain collectively over wages and working conditions.

The campaign to reform WEP has been led by an uneasy coalition of New York's public employees union, District Council 37, and the radical neighborhood organization ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now). The goal is to force the city to recognize WEP workers' bargaining rights; this may ultimately require a lawsuit, but the short-term hope is that the city council can be pressured into overruling Giuliani. The symbolic October election was conducted by a committee chaired by former mayor David Dinkins and former Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union president Jack Sheinkman. The ballots asked workfare workers whether they would like to join a union, and specifically whether they would like to join a union—specifically a District Council 37/ACORN bargaining unit.

Kate and I reported to work at 7:30 on a cold Monday morning. Our voting station was outside a check-cashing store on Willoughby Street in downtown Brooklyn. On this particular Monday morning, I wasn't feeling too cheerful about the project of the left. This was in the middle of the early wave of Teamsters-scandal revelations; it was just becoming clear that the affair might paralyze the AFL-CIO's entire new progressive leadership. And a fellow committee member from Democratic Socialists of America had just been arrested by the FBI and charged with spying for the East German police state from 1973 until its demise. The environment of Willoughby Street didn't sharpen my fighting spirit: downtown Brooklyn is, on the surface, a living vindication of Jack Kemp's worldview. On every block is at least one forbidding gray courthouse or social service agency; it's the land of jury duty and the Department of Motor Vehicles. But the non-statist sector of downtown is astoundingly vibrant: there isn't a vacant storefront to be seen, and there are hundreds of sidewalk vendors, almost all of them immigrants from West Africa, the West Indies, or South Asia.

We were met at our station by Bertha Lewis, the director of New York City ACORN. She went through the drill with us: how to hold our clipboards, how to approach people, how to reassure them that their supervisors won't find out that they've signed. But I wasn't paying very close attention to these lessons; instead my mind kept wandering to *where does Bertha get her energy?* For she wasn't just instructing the two of us: she was running back and forth across three blocks of Willoughby, setting up six different election sites and instructing ten different volunteers. When Kate and I dithered for a moment in posting a "JOBS WITH JUSTICE/WEP WORKERS

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VOTE HERE" sign, Bertha reached in with a roll of masking tape and had the thing up in about six seconds. And when I thought I was being pretty aggressive about accosting passersby, Bertha showed me how to walk into the check-cashing office and work the people waiting in line; she harvested fifteen signatures in the time in took me to do my usual rap.

ACORN is famous on the left, and often disparaged, for its extreme work ethic: organizers working twenty hours a day for tiny salaries, knocking on doors in poor neighborhoods late into the evening. I've always feigned disapproval when I've heard these stories, but that kind of life—it won't surprise you to learn—holds a secret appeal. And so, when I could have been honing a few mundane but crucial political skills, I spent most of the morning in a cloud, having fantasies about becoming an ACORN organizer. It would be like joining the Marines, I thought, or becoming a Jesuit; so many fewer decisions to make. No more temptations to squander the day reading the *New York Observer*.

As it happened, it didn't matter very much whether I concentrated on my clipboard-holding technique. This was the easiest political organizing I'd ever done. Many of the WEP workers in the area were well aware of the elections, because of ACORN's advance telephone and door-to-door canvassing. And they were all angry. During the course of the day I heard at least two dozen stories about how—since the city has failed to fund new child-card programs for the children of WEP workers—women have had to foist their children on aunts, grandmothers, boyfriends. Several women explained to me that the WEP program has yanked them out of continuing-education and high-school-equivalency programs, and forced them into menial jobs that don't teach any particular skills. (I took about 120 signatures that morning; by the week's end, over half the WEP workers in the city had voted in the election, and the overwhelming majority of them checked "yes.")

These women's stories were urgent and moving. But here, too, I wasn't really paying full attention. Instead of focusing on the WEP workers' concrete sufferings and their short-term campaign to improve their situation, I kept having flashes of my usual perfectionist yearnings. Some of these yearnings were about my own life, and the strength and discipline I could attain as an ACORN soldier. But I also brought these callow hopes to bear on the movement in toto. As in my Lexington religious life, I kept daydreaming that the ACORN campaign would be miraculously successful: that New York trade unions would suddenly recover their 1930s role as radical social movements; that every bond trader in the city would fight for a steeply progressive income tax; that every real-estate lawyer would volunteer twenty hours a week in the public school system.

When the morning ended we turned in our clipboards and headed for our day jobs—Kate in one direction and I in another. At the corner of Fulton and Jay Streets I passed a team of Jehovah's Witnesses handing out leaflets about the end of the world; across the street from them was a Nation of Islam table. Further west, in the yuppie precincts of Brooklyn Heights, there were no more zealots to be seen—only comfortable Benthamites who looked like they spend a lot of time at their health clubs.

As I walked down Montague Street I reviewed the morning's millenarian daydreams. They were mighty foolish, for reasons that we can all recite: A politics that expects citizens magically to become virtuous is no politics at all. And the dream of becoming a rock-ribbed twenty-hour-a-day community organizer is (at least in my case) a yearning to escape political complexity and everyday frustration.

THE EVERYDAY frustrations of the WEP workers campaign are pretty serious. New York's labor movement, my grandiose fantasies to the contrary, has committed few resources to it so far. Two of the organizers on Willoughby Street complained to me that District Council 37 is still half-hearted about the effort—partly, it's said, for fear of angering Giuliani. And then there were the two guys in Teamsters jackets (with "Hoffa '96" and American flag patches) who delivered a soda machine to the building where I was assigned. They scoped out my WELFARE WORKERS VOTE HERE sign with unmistakable hostility. I thought for a moment about the earnest

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things I'd say to them about the project—about how a city program that employs forty thousand people at subminimum wage hurts all workers' interests, and so on. But when I saw them again they were at a pay phone making an uncivil call ("You tell her this is *fucking Patrick*, all right? She's gonna talk to me *now*"). Maybe next time, I thought.

Most of the WEP workers I talked to, for all their eagerness to sign, seemed deeply skeptical of the campaign's prospects. At least ten times I heard some variation of "We're never gonna win a damn thing as long as Giuliani is in there." And they hardly speak with one mind and voice against welfare reform; several WEP workers volunteered to me that some people *deserve* to be forced into jobs programs. "I know people who sit around all day doing nothing," said one woman. "But people who are trying to improve themselves need better respect. We need child care and we need the minimum wage."

The virtue of good political organizers is that they have the strength to embrace these kinds of ambivalence, complexity, and irony—to get up every day prepared to be mildly disappointed by coalition partners, elected officials, humanity at large. But walking through downtown Brooklyn that morning I wondered if my own political energies didn't draw on—and in some sense *require*—the opposite quality: a perfectionist rage and impatience. My political commitments are democratic and reformist, but I'm not sure whether I'd take these commitments seriously if I didn't have, somewhere buried inside me, a little tyrant, waving around maps of the saved and the damned. ●

DAVID GLENN is associate editor of *Dissent*.

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The Liberals Done It

Elliott Currie

THE FUTURE ONCE HAPPENED HERE: NEW YORK, D.C., L.A., AND THE FATE OF AMERICA'S BIG CITIES
by Fred Siegel
Free Press, 1997 260 pp $24

At several points in reading this book, I had the curious feeling that Fred Siegel and I were living in different countries. In Siegel's America, powerful but naive liberals and leftists have dominated urban policy since the sixties—and they have run the cities into the ground. "Under the influence of a dizzying mix of guilt, fear, and hubris," liberals have demoralized the urban poor with vast amounts of federal largesse and strangled economic development in a sticky web of regulation. Meanwhile, they have virtually deregulated personal behavior—winking at crime, drug dealing, and illegitimacy. Among other things, this has ushered in "an extraordinary transfer of responsibility from the family to the state." As a result, families have disintegrated, dependency has soared, and violent crime has (at least until recently) risen. There is change in the air, however, as growing numbers of elected officials (and others) are rejecting the destructive blandishments of liberalism and looking to markets, rather than government, to save the cities.

Siegel's book purports to chart these developments by focusing on three cities—New York, Washington, and Los Angeles. This could have been a useful exercise. The urban problems Siegel portrays—high levels of violence and poverty, dysfunctional public services, bureaucratic incompetence and corruption—are very real, and serious debate about them is always welcome. But though there is some interesting anecdotal material here, the overall analysis mainly recycles what is by now a badly shopworn set of conservative platitudes that didn't stand up to scrutiny in the sixties, much less in the nineties.

The idea that the urban crisis was caused by liberal policies is hardly new—indeed, Siegel adds little conceptually to an argument the right has been making since, at the very least, the publication of Edward Banfield's *The Unheavenly City* in the late sixties. But to anyone who lives in the America that I do, the notion that "the left" has run urban policy in any meaningful sense, for good or ill, in recent years is—well, more than a little wacky. At a time when the policies of the right of center have engulfed the cities for nearly thirty years, we're asked to believe that liberals have brought urban America to its knees. It's surely true that in some places incompetent or self-serving politicians to the left of center have made bad situations worse; Siegel won't find much argument on this, certainly, in the case of Washington. But Siegel wants us to believe something more: that liberal ideology and liberal social policy are largely to blame for the violence, poverty, and job loss that have battered the cities since the sixties. Over-generous government, animated by what Siegel calls the "riot ideology"—the post-Watts belief that black violence could and should be bought off by social programs—has wrecked the cities.

What's wrong with this picture? So much that it's hard to know where to begin. Let's start with the fact that Siegel's argument depends on a highly selective rendering of the recent history of these three cities, in which a narrow focus on the beliefs and actions of some urban liberals on their home turf overshadows the far more consequential march of national and state urban policy to the right.

Nowhere is this more true than in his treat-

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ment of violent crime. In Siegel's America, the liberal deregulation of personal behavior brought about a new tolerance of crime and drugs that fueled explosive rises in crime in the cities. He pins part of the blame for New York City's decline in particular on those who wanted to decriminalize various kinds of minor crime and drug use in the sixties (in his account, a curious coalition that ranged from city police chiefs to Herbert Marcuse). You'd never know from his discussion that in the real New York, the prison population skyrocketed during these years—in good part because of the increasingly harsh sentences for drug offenses, even low-level ones, mandated under the famous Rockefeller Drug Law in the early seventies, self-consciously touted as the "nation's toughest." Liberals may have wanted drugs decriminalized, but "moderates" filled the prisons to the rafters with minor drug offenders.

Likewise, Siegel pokes fun at the supposed romanticization of street gangsters and rioters by naive Los Angeles liberals—suggesting that fuzzy-minded liberal tolerance for predators helped to nurture a gang culture that drove the city's violent crime through the roof. Hello? This is the state whose prison population has risen sevenfold in the past two decades, where a shoplifter with a couple of youthful burglary convictions can be sent to prison for life, and where four times as many black men are "enrolled" in state prison as in state colleges. (It must be the influence of guilty soft-on-crime liberals that explains why we've built twenty-one prisons—and one college—in California since the mid-eighties.) I'd love to think that those of us who have been doggedly advocating more liberal criminal justice policies in California had carried the day for lo these many years. I'd also like to believe in the tooth fairy.

THE SAME curious inversion of the real thrust of recent social policy happens with welfare—unsurprisingly, a major villain in Siegel's story (a "key ingredient in the toxic brew that devastated vast sections" of New York City, among others). Siegel adds nothing new here, but mainly regurgitates the conventional conservative dogma that an out-of-control welfare state pumped up by liberal advocates for the poor has destroyed families and kept the poor trapped in dependency: the argument, in short, that if we just hadn't given poor black people so damned much money, the cities would be in much better shape. Once again, the first problem with this story is that Siegel vastly overstates the scope and depth of liberal influence on welfare policy. It's true that some liberals fought in the sixties to extend benefits to the large numbers of eligible people who weren't getting what was theirs by law. And welfare rolls did indeed increase in most places—though in many states, from shockingly low and even declining levels in the fiftes and early sixties. But as Siegel comes perilously close to acknowledging, the growth in public generosity was desperately short lived. By the end of the sixties the tide had already begun to turn; by the seventies, the already minimal American welfare state was in hasty retreat. The numbers here, after all, are plentiful and well known: Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) benefits per child in poverty, for example, dropped by nearly a third between 1975 and 1993. In the real America, the right, not the left, has had the upper hand in income-support policy for twenty-five years. Siegel, again, almost acknowledges that, but lamely tells us that by the early seventies "most of the damage had already been done." Thus do conservative writers get around the inconvenient fact that the foundering of the cities in the past quarter century has mainly happened on their watch.

The claim that liberal policies have caused the mess in the cities, in short, depends on the belief that we have actually *had* liberal policies. But although many cities have indeed had liberal *governments*, the *policies* that most powerfully affected them—certainly in such matters as criminal justice and welfare—have lately been shaped mainly by conservatives and mainly at the state and federal levels. But there's an even worse problem with Siegel's analysis. The idea that liberal policies brought about the ills of the cities runs up against the stubborn reality that the problems—rising violence, the growth of single-parent families, teenagers having babies—emerged over the last thirty years in *most* cities across the coun-

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try, including many that could be described as liberal only through the most heroic feats of the conservative imagination. Both violent crime rates and rates of single parenthood, for example, have frequently been at their worst in many southern cities, in some of which liberalism has traditionally been a four-letter word and where the idea that govenment largesse has coddled and demoralized the poor would be cruel if it weren't laughable.

This national reality is obscured by Siegel's choice of New York, Washington, and Los Angeles as exemplars—since, as he notes, all three metropolitan areas are relatively wealthy and all have a substantial tradition of liberal politics (though Siegel sometimes exaggerates this: anyone who thinks of Los Angeles as a quintessentially liberal city probably doesn't live there). If we focus on these three cities and carefully ignore the rest of the country, the argument that liberalism caused crime and dependency can almost achieve a superficial plausibility. If we look at urban America as a whole, it loses even that.

Consider violent crime again. Siegel points to sharply rising violence in Washington as yet another manifestation of the guilt-driven, lenient welfare state run wild. And the homicide rate in Washington has indeed been horrendous—from 1970 to 1995, it roughly doubled. But it also doubled in, for example, Jackson, Mississippi, and more than quadrupled in New Orleans. Violent crime shot upward in cities throughout the South and Southwest, in states whose policies toward crime were notoriously harsh and where imprisonment rates rose even faster than in the rest of the country. Does anyone seriously believe that this is because police chiefs and sheriffs in, say, Louisiana or Mississippi abandoned the notion of personal responsibility in favor of "moral deregulation"? Were the prison authorities in these states consumed by liberal guilt? Who, exactly, in these places was promoting the liberal policies that Siegel says caused crime, and what, exactly, were those policies?

Or consider welfare again. Like many other writers on the right, Siegel trots out the stock notion that over-generous income benefits are what caused poor families to break up at high rates and teens to have illegitimate babies—and, like them, simply ignores the many years of serious research showing that the connections are both far more tenuous and much more complicated. And even a cursory look at the experience of places other than Washington, Los Angeles, or New York drives the point home. In 1993, the highest proportions of single-parent families in the fifty states were in Mississippi and Louisiana, which paid, on average, respectively, $120 and $164 a month to an AFDC family of three. (There they go again, rewarding people for behaving badly.) How, in these places, do you make the argument that lavish federal government money for social services "sowed the seeds of self-destruction"?

Am I saying that liberals were never part of the problem? Not at all. Certainly, there were, and are, plenty of self-serving, venal, and/or misguided elected officials on the left of center (there aren't any, of course, on the right). That's a real problem, and it's one that progressives haven't taken seriously enough. It's hard to read Siegel's description of Washington's recent political history without squirming a little. Progressives, of all people, need to be especially tough on bureaucratic incompetence and corruption wherever it's

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found, not least because it lends a veneer of plausibility to the knee-jerk rejection of the public sector, of the very idea of public solutions to public ills. But that's a long way from saying that liberal policies were responsible for the grim state of America's cities generally—or that faith in the market will rescue them.

Indeed, a moment's reflection reminds us that the opposite argument is far more compelling. If we look around the world at other advanced industrial countries, we see cities that are generally far safer and far less poverty-stricken than our own; we often even see competently delivered public services and public bureaucracies that, on the whole, work pretty well. Behind those differences, more often than not, are the strong social-democratic movements and parties that the United States notoriously lacks (or corporatist parties that have promoted structurally similar policies). What this suggests, unless one is wearing ideological blinkers, is that the plight of our cities reflects the weakness of American liberalism, not its strength.

The key problem, in short, is not that the left had too much influence on urban policy in the United States but that it had too little. As a result, urban liberals typically wound up with the thankless and Sisyphean job of managing the mess left by a largely unregulated and heedless private economy. Liberals have never been able to institutionalize an employment policy that could have addressed the disruptive impact of the great internal migrations to the cities from the thirties onward; they were never able to establish the reliable and universal public services (including health care and family supports) that cushioned the impact of economic shifts on families and communities in many other countries. As a result they inherited both high levels of social pathology and weak mechanisms for dealing with it.

Siegel argues that the plight of the cities reflects the spread of what he calls "dependent individualism"—the combination of "an antipathy to economic markets and a faith in a free market in morals." But more important in understanding the state of American cities is what we might call "residual collectivism." By residual collectivism I mean the tendency in a market-driven society for the benefits of the market economy to be privatized while its costs tend to be socialized. In effect, we turn over the management of the ugly and intractable consequences of market-based inequality and misinvestment to local bureaucracies that are usually poorly funded and poorly staffed. We don't deal with the structural sources of the problems (that's called interfering with the free market), and so we are always pushing the same rock uphill. Too often, we don't insist on higher standards or better management because we do not, at the end of the day, care very much whether the bureaucracies succeed or not—whether their ostensible goal is educating poor kids who don't have much of a place in the market economy, or protecting them from abuse by demoralized and stressed parents, or seeing to it that they go to school in the morning healthy and well fed. We then point with great smugness to their predictable failure as evidence that "government" can't work, or that the public sector is inherently inferior to the private. What it really tells us, of course, is something more complicated: that the public sector won't work well if its main job is to pick up the pieces. Where liberalism has indeed failed the cities, it is mostly here—in the willingness to let the role of government become defined as tending to the dirty work that the market has left behind. ●

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A Fanatic's Journey

Paul Berman

RADICAL SON
by David Horowitz
Free Press, 1997 468 pp $27.50

A GOOD MANY readers of *Dissent* subscribe to the *New Republic*, and those readers will thrill at the opportunity to discover anew the following letter-to-the-editor, which ran in the *New Republic* a few months ago.

> To the editor:
>
> I have noticed with astonishment and growing consternation that an ad invoking my entirely innocent name has run in your pages not once but twice in recent weeks. The ad promotes a book by someone called David Horowitz, on the topic of how Horowitz used to be a left-wing fanatic and then became a right-wing fanatic. I am quoted saying something-or-other about Horowitz.
>
> The quotation, from an article of mine in the *Village Voice* many years ago, is accurate. But the use of that quotation within the ad may leave an impression among readers that I have in some way endorsed Horowitz's book or its author. Not so. In my judgment, a worse book has never been written, and as for the author, he is a demented lunatic.
>
> Paul Berman
> New York, NY

Actually, the version of this letter that ran in the *New Republic* omitted the part about Horowitz's being a demented lunatic. It has been suggested to me that, in deleting that particular phrase from my carefully composed letter, the editors of the *New Republic* did me a favor. The letter sounds entirely moderate and incontestable in the version in which it ran, but otherwise might have aroused a suspicion that I had exaggerated, ever so slightly, Horowitz's flaws. But would the suspicion have been correct? The readers should consider the background to my letter. In his book Horowitz writes about many things, and one of them is me. I am made out to be a creep of the first order, not quite as horrible as Tom Hayden, but bad enough. And then the author and his publishers had the gall to purchase advertisements in several magazines,not just the *New Republic*, making it seem that I applaud the very book that hangs me from a lamppost. To be accurate, the publishers are not completely responsible. I sent the publishers a letter of anguished complaint when I saw the amazing ad, and they wrote back very courteously, explaining that Horowitz composed his own ad copy and paid for the space himself. (That's what we authors have come to, in this age of penny-pinching publishers. Momentarily I feel a sympathy for poor old Horowitz, a man with a book to sell.) The ad did carry the publisher's logo, though. So what can I do? I can review the book.

Horowitz has told his life story before, first in a series of magazine articles (for example, in *Soldier of Fortune*, January 1987, which is an episode in his publishing career that he evidently wishes to suppress) and then in a book called *Destructive Generation*, which he wrote together with his long-time colleague Peter Collier. The new book, *Radical Son*, offers some additional details, especially about his personal life, and allows him to take pot shots at a long list of persons as shady as myself (Todd Gitlin! Hendrik Hertzberg! Robert Scheer! Christopher Hitchens! and more). But the book says nothing significantly new about how his left-wing rancors metamorphosed into right-wing rancors. Some of his details are

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worth noting. Horowitz is a good example, perhaps the best of all examples, of the disastrous influence of American communism on the New Left. His youth in the Communist Party USA in Queens, New York, during the 1950s appears to have shaped him for life. The feeling of belonging to a superior yet deeply hated and persecuted vanguard of mankind; the habit of cleverly presenting himself as a far more moderate personality than he is; the patient zeal for building up a large movement that is intended eventually to undo democracy, in the ordinary sense of the word; the casual feeling about other people's lives; the desire for violent cataclysms; the rage at his enemies; the contempt, above all, for liberalism and its wishy-washy ways—these were Horowitz s birthright, and he has clung to them faithfully.

His mother and father left the Party in the mid-fifties, but like many people from that generation, they seem to have held on for some time to their Marxist-Leninist ideals and habits of mind. This was true of their son as well. He entered student politics at Columbia and Berkeley in the later fifties and early sixties as an independent left-wing revolutionary, unaffiliated with any Leninist organization. Informally, though, Horowitz kept up ties with other children of the Communist Party, and at Berkeley the network of these Red Diaper babies proved to be energetic and influential in helping to found the New Left. His book describes that role in a strikingly contradictory way. In certain passages he makes clear that he and his fellow Red Diaper babies acted as a more-or-less self-conscious Leninist vanguard, deceiving other members of the incipient New Left, the ones without communist backgrounds, into building up a movement that pretended to favor peace and a democratic radicalism but that actually intended to bring about a Marxist-Leninist revolution. In other passages, though, he describes himself as a New Left free-thinker, as someone who wanted to break with the rigidities and authoritarianism of the old communist tradition, and who was frustrated in his atttempt to do so by some of his very nasty authoritarian-minded comrades in the Berkeley left during the sixties and seventies.

The contradiction is telling, and I think that both versions accurately describe not just Horowitz but a number of people with his sort of background. He was a democratic rebel against the Old Left; and a Leninist. A free-thinker; and a dogmatist. A friend of freedom; and of totalitarianism. The radical-democratic free-thinking side of his personality gave him his public appeal, which was great during the high tide of the New Left (that was what I had written in the *Village Voice*, and was quoted as saying in Horowitz's ad). And the Leninist side of his personality gave him his inner fervor and unbreakable sense of superiority. He was a man with two doctrines, one for the public and for certain of his moods, the other for his sense of inner purpose and for a small number of comrades. The combination of ideas and attitudes was unstable; but then, Horowitz has had an unstable career.

In the Bay Area he worked as an editor of *Ramparts*, the most important of the New Left magazines in the sixties and early seventies, and he did a great deal to promote the Black Panther Party, which had its national headquarters in Oakland. The Panthers contained quite a few admirable and idealistic people around the country, who have demonstrated their qualities by going on to new lives, post-Panther, as political leaders and intellectuals. But in its Oakland inner core, among the highest leaders, the Panther Party was a grisly group. Huey Newton murdered at least two people, was a rapist, and a drug addict. Eldridge Cleaver was a rapist. Panther headquarters in Oakland ran a series of drug and prostitution rackets. Hit men from party headquarters were always murdering one or another erring member. And if these Panther leaders became famous as noble and heroic rebels, if millions of black people in America and all kinds of people around the world came to see the Oakland militants as viable and earnest leaders of an admirable American and third world radical protest movement—this was in some degree Horowitz's doing. He and a few other people at *Ramparts* helped create and popularize the Panther image. Other people were honestly deceived about the Panthers, but Horowitz has only himself to blame.

The Panthers reached the height of their

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national influence in the years around 1969, and thereafter went into a decline—partly because the party split between a Newton faction of violent gangsters and a Cleaver faction that was even worse, and partly because the FBI and local police departments launched a campaign of repression. But mostly the Panther influence dwindled because it was never fated to do anything else. The *idea* of the Panthers was attractive to people on the radical left—the idea that you could read about in *Ramparts* magazine. It was the idea of a militant mixture of socialism and black nationalism, capable of addressing deep issues of economic inequality and exploitation and not just of racial discrimination, capable of joining together the struggle of America's blacks with the struggles of many other people in America and around the world. I was a Panther supporter myself because of that idea, back in 1969 and 1970, when I was in college. I belonged to a student group in New York that agitated and demonstrated and generally ran amok on behalf of any Panther who found himself in trouble with the police, which was a lot of Panthers. But the more I agitated, the more I began to wonder.

THE PARTY'S newspaper, the *Black Panther*, with its adulation of Huey Newton as the "Supreme Servant of the People" and its veiled calls to murder one or another Panther dissident, was nothing like what I had expected from having read about the Panthers in *Ramparts* and other places. The newspaper exuded a spirit of pathological authoritarianism. The Panthers themselves, whenever I saw them at meetings or demonstrations, were not very attractive. They dressed like an old-fashioned European fascist movement. They talked like thugs. They swaggered like thugs (although it's also true that, at demonstrations, the Panthers used to march in a snappy, dance-style picket line that suggested a better humor and an artistic touch). And I pulled away—as did a great many other puzzled soldiers of the movement, white and black.

I am aware that some people found the Panthers' scary quality thrilling. A white cult of black primitivism surrounded the party, which in other circumstances would have been recognized as demeaning. A certain kind of liberal continued to linger happily over the Panther cause for that reason, even when, by the early and mid-seventies, the tide on the radical left had drifted elsewhere. And among the people who continued to linger was David Horowitz, who was anything but a liberal. Instead of plunging into identity politics or brown rice, like most other people on the radical left in the middle seventies, he deepened his Panther commitments. He raised money for the Panthers. He hobnobbed with Newton himself, at Newton's famously posh apartment. He promoted their Oakland enterprises.

Why did he do that? One factor would appear to be a remarkable streak of naiveté in Horowitz's personality. Hugh Pearson, in his valuable book *The Shadow of the Panther: Huey Newton and the Price of Black Power in America*, puts some emphasis on a story that Horowitz has repeated in *Radical Son*—about how, as part of his Panther work, Horowitz brought the educator Herbert Kohl to meet Newton, with the hope of getting Kohl to back the Panthers' educational program. Kohl noticed that Newton was sniffing like a cocaine addict. Somehow Horowitz had failed to see anything of the sort. Kohl explained it to him. Horowitz still couldn't see it. He was like his parents in that way, I think. I can imagine that his parents were authentically naive about Stalin, though people must have been telling them for years not to be. Horowitz the son was equally naive about the Panthers. Naiveté is a scary quality, in politics.

In his new book Horowitz repeats a story that he has previously told about how the *Ram-*

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parts book-keeper, Betty Van Patter, was murdered by the Panthers. In his earlier book, *Destructive Generation*, he and Peter Collier made it seem as if they had actively approved of Panther murders, and that Horowitz bore a considerable responsibility for putting the book-keeper into danger. In the new book, he insists that his responsibility was less direct—that he really had not noticed the scale of Panther violence and would not have approved of murder, had he known of it. In any case, this particular murder shocked him out of his naiveté. And at last a mood of self-reflection began to steal over him.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* was published just about then, in the middle seventies, and Horowitz tells us that he read it and was strongly affected. That strikes me as very interesting. Vast numbers of people were influenced by Solzhenitsyn in those years—in France, for instance. There was the case of André Glucksmann, the philosopher, who to my eyes offers a usefully instructive trans-Atlantic perspective on Horowitz. These two men, Glucksmann and Horowitz, have led parallel lives. Each of them was born into a Jewish current of the Communist Party—in France, in America—during the era of Hitler. Each man was attracted to a dissident Marxism in the seventies, during his student days. Each became prominent as a radical journalist in the era of 1968. Horowitz's most influential book during his left-wing period was a political tract called *Empire and Revolution*, in favor of third world guerrilla struggles against U.S. imperialism, which came out in 1969. Glucksmann's most important early book was a philosophical treatise called *Le discours de la guerre*, in favor of the same struggles against the same imperialism, which came out in 1967.

Glucksmann became an intellectual leader of Paris Maosim, Horowitz an intellectual leader of California's pro-Panther left, and those two movements vibrated to the same tones—the cult of prisoners and of lumpenproletarian violence; the dream of an all-cleansing, all-destroying civil war; the glamorous excitement of raffish success (as represented by certain famous intellectuals in Paris, and by certain famous movie personalities in California). Each man, Glucksmann and Horowitz, devoted several years to that milieu, and then each underwent a soul-wrenching trauma—in Horowitz's case, the murder of the book-keeper by his own admired allies in the Black Panther Party; in Glucksmann's case, the murder, in 1972, of Israel's athletes at the Munich Olympics by his admired allies in the Palestine Liberation Organization. And in both cases, then came the experience of reading Solzhenitsyn's fat astonishing volumes.

But what a difference in how those two men responded to what they read! Glucksmann reemerged from his study of Solzhenitsyn to write a serious analysis of leftism and the totalitarian mentality, then went on to produce a series of other books, critical of the mainstream left and of Marxism, sometimes a little stridently, but usually in an intelligent vein (even if not everyone among the criticized has wanted to acknowledge the intelligence). But Horowitz dropped his more thoughtful aspect altogether. Now was his moment at *Soldier of Fortune*. He became a simpleminded fanatic—the mirror image of his worst (and not his best) moments on the left. This, it seems to me, has been the greatest failure in Horowitz's life, and an unfortunate one for the many thousands of people on the American left who had been his readers. The American New Left never did come to a proper reckoning with communism and totalitarianism—or rather, came to a series of pseudo-reckonings that allowed the aging veterans of the left to mutter a few exculpatory phrases about libertarian ideals and to leave the rest of what they had previously thought unchanged. The line of intellectual succession that led, in the literature of American anti-imperialism, from the 1960s left-wing writings of David Horowitz (with his Leninist sympathies and his Leninist interpretation of America as the seat of world evil) to the later graphomaniacal writings of Noam Chomsky (with his nominal anti-Leninism and his Leninist interpretation of America as the seat of world evil) shows the lack of progress. It might have made a difference if Horowitz, like Glucksmann in France, had written some serious studies of communism, in an effort to

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explain reality to himself and to his own readers on the left. But that was not his impulse.

There is something valuable in Horowitz's account of his life with the Panthers and the California left—in the record that he provides of Berkeley radicalism and Newton's personality and the Panther-ish tang of left-wing life during the later, mad days of the New Left. But everything he says has to be taken with a grain of salt. You cannot draw a line between Horowitz's way-out politics and his reporting of events, and conclude that the former represents mere opinion but the latter bears a reliable relation to fact. His crusader spirit exalts him, and in his exalted state of mind he can't be bothered to get the little details right. In a review of *Radical Son* in the *New Leader*, the historian David M. Oshinsky noted a number of Horowitz's errors—on the Alger Hiss affair and the history of Senator Joe McCarthy, not to mention the World Series of 1947—which, in Oshinsky's words, "raise questions about the way Horowitz remembers events."

I can raise the same questions in regard to what he remembers about me. His judgments are not kind: I am a lousy guy, undeserving of a fellowship; my main achievement in life is to have been unfair to David Horowitz in a review of an earlier book of his for the *New Republic* (the issue of April 24, 1989, for anyone who is interested); I was mean to him on other occasions, too; my looks displease him; I am associated with a disreputable cash-cow journal called *Dissent*; and so forth. But he also tells a story about running into me in Managua in 1987, and—this does trouble me—his telling has about it an air of fact. I happened to be in Managua reporting on the Sandinista People's Revolution for the *Village Voice*. Horowitz was there as a representative of Elliott Abrams, who in those days was President Reagan's assistant secretary of state. Abrams's policy was to arrange a military victory for Nicaragua's *contra* insurgents over the Sandinista People's Army.

Horowitz and I ran into each other in the lobby of that seediest and most spy-infested of tropical grand hotels, Managua's Hotel Intercontinental. He recalls that we argued, and that he concluded by shouting, "For the sake of the poorest peasant in this Godforsaken country, I can't wait for the contras to march into this town and liberate it from these fucking Sandinistas." I do remember him saying words to that effect. Then he says that he got up from a table where we had been sitting and invited me to accompany him and Peter Collier and their group to the editorial office of *La Prensa*, the anti-Sandinista newspaper. The Sandinista government had shut down *La Prensa* for the last fifteen months, and now it was about to reopen. But I failed to accept Horowitz's invitation. He comments:

> Perhaps Berman would have learned something if he had come along. It was a historic moment—the ceremony to mark the reopening of *La Prensa*, which the Sandinista censorship had closed. Its editor, Violeta Chamorro, was an elegant woman who would soon be the new president of Nicaragua, elected on the popular tide that drove the Sandinistas from power . . . . Here, as everywhere we went, all the factions of the political spectrum that wanted to see democracy returned to Nicaragua supported the *contras*. They did so because they understood, as Berman did not, that the only future Nicaragua could look forward to under Sanidinista rule was the dire poverty and gulag existence of every other communist state. Like other American socialists who flocked to Nicaragua, Berman was finally uninterested in the democratic revolution that was taking place all around him.

COLLIER TOLD the same story about me in the *Weekly Standard* last year, except that he made even clearer the suggestion that I failed to witness the reopening of the newspaper. One part of the story is true. I did indeed decline to travel the angry, tense streets of Sandinista Managua in the company of a wild-eyed emissary of the Reagan adminstration who was fond of shouting, "I can't wait for the *contras* to march into this town." But large parts of everything else in Horowitz's paragraph are false, and, at risk of delighting the readers to excess with still more arcana of ten years ago, I would like to underline a few of those falsehoods—if only to correct a few popular American myths about

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Nicaragua's past and to beam a few more sunny rays on the dark theme of Horowitz's way with facts.

To begin with: the claim that "all the factions" that favored democracy in Nicaragua in 1987 favored the *contras*. This is untrue. The *contra* war in the 1980s was a battle of the countryside against the cities, and the *contras*' popularity, great in certain regions—much greater than I and many other journalists knew at the time—was concentrated in the faraway jungles and remote cow towns, not in the cities and especially not in Managua (which is why we journalists failed to see the popularity). The *contras* were a brutal peasant army from the jungles and the mountains, and if they had ever marched into the capital, there would have been block-by-block scenes of indescribable bloodshed, and everyone knew it.

Contra support was U.S. policy, though, and the feeling about that policy among the anti-Sandinista politicians, activists, and journalists in Managua was duly ambiguous. Some of those people fled into exile and joined the *contras*, in the hope that somehow America would make everything come out well. Other people stayed in Managua and kept up a strictly civil opposition and quietly fumed over America's unhelpful role. *La Prensa* was typical in this respect. I don't know what the *Prensa* people told Horowitz when he came to visit—he was Abrams's emissary, and they may have told him anything he wanted to hear. But the *Prensa* editors were, in fact, split. The *Prensa* staffers who did support the *contras* had mostly been lured out of Nicaragua by Abrams's State Department, which had put them to work on the *contra* radio station or had given them positions in the *contra* political structure, such as it was. Some of the *Prensa* editors who remained in Managua during those difficult months when their newspaper was not allowed to publish felt pretty bitter about that. They felt that the American government, with its military fantasies, had undermined the civic struggle for democracy, which was the only struggle that mattered for Nicaragua's future. When the doughty editors succeeded in getting *La Prensa* reopened, they were seriously shorthanded as a result, which was infuriating to them.

As for Violeta Chamorro, the newspaper's editor-in-chief, her relations with the *contras* were anything but simple. Her own struggles against the Sandinistas kept strictly to a civic path. The reason that Nicaraguans elected Chamorro president in 1990 was precisely because she had always maintained a nonviolent and democratic attitude, had never gone into exile, had never endorsed a civil war. The *contras* themselves did not like Chamorro. All but a few of the *contra* leaders boycotted the historic election in 1990, on the ground that any election under Sandinista auspices could not be fair (which was Abrams's position, too, judging by a debate I had with him two months earlier). When Chamorro won anyway and became president, most of the *contras* went on opposing her, sometimes (not always) with good reason, because they continued to be oppressed and impoverished peasants, no matter who ruled Managua.

What people did want in Managua—a plain majority of people by the later eighties—was peace, prosperity, upward mobility, and democracy. In my interpretation, a democratic revolution had been going on for a long while there and in large parts of Nicaragua—a revolution from below, intended to overthrow the dictatorships of the right and the left. That was the theme of my *Village Voice* journalism in articles like "Double Reality: People's Revolution versus Sandinista Revolution" (which was, I believe, the longest analysis of Nicaragua to appear anywhere in the U.S. press during the 1980s, and the fullest exposition of the democratic revolution) and "Neckties and Mass Graves: In Nicaragua, the Real Revolution is Just Beginning." From the point of view of the democratic revolution, the reopening of *La Prensa* was a crucial event. And so, of course I went to see. I was part of the jostling crowd lining up for a copy of the first issue on that historic day. Even today I still treasure my yellowed copy of that issue, with its inky headline eternally exulting, "The People Triumphed!" When I got back to New York I wrote a detailed account of the reopening for the *Voice*. Which didn't prevent Peter Collier from saying otherwise in the *Weekly Standard* or Horowitz from repeating the calumny in his book. And then Horowitz adds, to boot, that I

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was "finally uninterested" in the democratic revolution!

So how reliable can Horowitz be on all kinds of other people who receive a much nastier treatment in his book than I do—how reliable on people who, not being journalists, can't point to back issues of newspapers like the *Voice* to show him up? Horowitz misled the world about the Panthers in the late sixties and seventies, but his more recent portraits of them conform to what was said as early as 1978 by the reporter Kate Coleman, then by the reporter Edward J. Epstein, and finally, at full length, by Hugh Pearson in *The Shadow of the Panther*—all of which gives reason to conclude that Horowitz's more recent account of life and death among the Panthers is accurate enough, in its larger strokes. But what about his smaller strokes? I think he is the sort of man who, when whim or political passion carries him away, which is most of the time, would be perfectly happy to damage the reputation of any hapless person who ventures across his path. He is on a mission; his knife is out. I think he feels that a ruthless disregard for truth and facts is the practical way to proceed on all political questions, and there's no point in finicking about the details. His merry enraged enthusiasm for a military triumph in Managua back in 1987 was not just a momentary display of pique, in my estimation. His parents brought him up in a radical political culture devoted to ruthlessness and a famously flexible notion of truth, and, as the title of his book proclaims, he is, even today, in his days of gung-ho right-wing emotionalism, a *Radical Son*. The last Stalinist, in his fashion. ●

Paul Berman is the author of *A Tale of Two Utopias: The Political Journey of the Generation of 1968*.

George Packer

The Novel as Counterhistory

Underworld
by Don DeLillo
Scribner, 1997 827 pp $27.50

Underworld has the makings of a masterpiece. It's a novel of the historical imagination on a vast scale, with uncompromising perceptual rigor. On the level of the sentence, it pulls off eight hundred pages of successful and often brilliant linguistic moves. On the level of structure, it travels through half a century in roughly reverse chronology and through a symphony of motifs whose interconnections demand another reading, and another. But it's impossible for me to contemplate reading *Underworld* again. It fails the most basic tests of narrative. It has no forward drive, or backward drive. Its incidents are random and without consequences. Its central characters have perceptions without lives, are largely unknowable and leave you cold. Every page is of the deepest interest, and yet the novel as a whole is boring. And this suggests something unavoidable in the relationship between DeLillo's two great subjects, fiction and history.

Any attempt to summarize *Underworld* will distort it, favorably and unfavorably, out of recognition. Its publisher presents the novel as a sort of love story between Nick Shay and Klara Sax: "He is trying to outdistance the crucial events of his early life, haunted by the hard logic of loss and by the echo of a gunshot in a basement room. She is an artist who has made a blood struggle for independence." This précis bears the scantest resemblance to the novel's real terms. There is a gunshot in a basement room, but as DeLillo writes at one point, "It was a gesture without a history," no cause, little effect. There is a woman who has left her hus-

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band to become a painter, but Klara Sax is the novel's least successful character, and Part 4 ("Cocksucker Blues: Summer 1974"), which she dominates, will defeat some readers at the halfway mark of a work that reserves great pleasures for its later sections.

In conventional narrative terms, *Underworld* is about the fate of the baseball that Bobby Thomson famously hit out of the Polo Grounds to win the pennant for the Giants over the Dodgers in 1951. And it is about Nick Shay, the man who decades later ends up with the ball, and about his brother Matt: Bronx sons of a small-time bookie who disappeared when they were young. At seventeen Nick has an affair with Klara, the wife of Matt's chess tutor; in that same year, 1952, Nick commits an act of unintended violence; he is sent to Jesuit reform school, emerges into the sixties, moves to Phoenix, becomes an executive of a waste-disposal corporation, marries, fathers, cheats, is cheated on, feels isolated, and longs for "the days of disarray when I walked real streets and did things slap-bang and felt angry and ready all the time, a danger to others and a distant mystery to myself."

Nick's distant mystery never lifts, and perhaps DeLillo chose to tell his story approximately backward, from 1992 to 1951, because the story itself—the odyssey of the baseball, the Bronx family, the shooting, the affairs, Nick and Klara's brief reunion in the desert—exists, strange to say, independent of the novel's real concerns: so a narrative reversal disguises the absence of plot and creates suspense about that echoed gunshot, which, it turns out, explains nothing. Nick's private life is entirely asserted rather than dramatized, determined by larger concerns, which is why he doesn't change or live on the page. And his prelapsarian Bronx of 1951–1952, remembered in nostalgic snatches of youthful slang, has a good deal more significance for the writer than for his readers.

TO LET the novel work on you as intensely as it can, you have to drop narrative expectations and, in effect, ignore what appear to be its main characters and stories. The action is in the eccentric rightness of the language, in image patterns, in recurring themes. I found that the best state of mind for reading *Underworld* was when it had begun to put me to sleep, submerged in that half-waking state where words have dream-associations with a suggestive power to stir obscure emotions and persuade you to accept claims about reality that you might resist if alert. Here is Klara watching the Zapruder film of the Kennedy assassination at an outré 1970s party:

> . . . it was glary and artless and completely steeped in being what it was, in being film. It carried a kind of inner life, something unconnected to the things we call phenomena. The footage seemed to advance some argument about the nature of film itself. The progress of the car down Elm Street, the movement of the film through the camera body, some sharable darkness—this was a death that seemed to rise from the streamy debris of the deep mind, it came from some night of the mind, there was some trick of film emulsion that showed the ghost of consciousness. Or so she thought to wonder. She thought to wonder if this home movie was some crude living likeness of the mind's own technology, the sort of death plot that runs in the mind, because it seemed so familiar, the footage did—it seemed a thing we might see, not see but know, a model of the nights when we are intimate with our own dying.

Underworld doesn't live between such riffs but in them, and there are too many to be named, mesmerizing prose poems, little imaginative essays—it would be difficult to overstate their inventiveness, their linguistic exuberance, or the intricacy of their design. Sister Edgar, a latex-gloved "cold war nun," obsessed with germ warfare and "the faith that replaces God with radioactivity" as she makes her rounds through disease and death in the lower circles of the Bronx. Another Edgar, Hoover, at the Polo Grounds on the day of Bobby Thomson's homer, which was also the day that the world learned of the Soviet atomic bomb, staring contentedly at the tormented creatures in a magazine reproduction of Bruegel's *The Triumph of Death*. Marvin Lundy, a baseball memorabilist, explaining the interconnectedness of all reality under the organizing discipline of nuclear weapons:

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"Which the whole thing is interesting because when they make an atomic bomb, listen to this, they make the radioactive core the exact same size as a baseball." Nick, the waste-disposal executive, musing on the nature of garbage: "Every bad smell is about us. We make our way through the world and come upon a scene that is medieval-modern, a city of high-rise garbage, the hell reek of every perishable object ever thrown together, and it seems like something we've been carrying all our lives." A brilliantly imagined Lenny Bruce taking his nightclub act across America the week of the Cuban missile crisis and freezing audiences with the one-liner: *"We're all gonna die!"*

Page after page the motifs return in every conceivable variation. The Bomb; waste; death—not quiet individual perishings, but mass destruction on a nuclear or hellish scale that renders individual life meaningless. The summing-up is left to a Russian entrepreneur named Viktor, who contracts with Nick to dispose of contaminated waste through underground nuclear explosions at the original Kazakh test site.

> I tell Viktor there is a curious connection between weapons and waste. . . . He says maybe one is the mystical twin of the other. He likes this idea. He says waste is the devil twin. Because waste is the secret history, the underhistory, the way archaeologists dig out the history of early cultures, every sort of bone heap and broken tool, literally from under the ground.
>
> All those decades, he says, when we thought about weapons all the time and never thought about the dark multiplying byproduct.
>
> "And in this case," I say. "In our case, in our age. What we excrete comes back to consume us."

But Nick could have spelled this out himself. Klara's uncanny perception of the Zapruder film could have been Matt Shay's, or J. Edgar Hoover's. Almost any line could be spoken by any character on any page. The riffs are attributed to someone or other but they all flow from the same slanted intelligence; they are all the same riff. "There was no context for the line except the one that Lenny took with him everywhere. The culture and its loaded words." The same is true of *Underworld*. Its context is DeLillo's total and static vision of the cold war. Forty years of American life and essentially nothing changes. The sweep of modern history, the cast of imaginary and real people, the Bronx and southwestern desert and Kazakhstan, the phenomenology of everyday objects, are reducible to "a certain furtive sameness." *Underworld* proposes that the cold war produced cultural death and attenuated lives lived in its shadow. Novelists, like historians, need points of demarcation: DeLillo's is October 3, 1951. The Bobby Thomson homer, coinciding with the Soviet nuclear test, was "the last time people spontaneously went out of their houses for something." Four decades of waste later, on the novel's penultimate page, Sister Edgar, wired into cyberspace, clicks on the H-bomb home page and "begins to sense the byshadows that stretch from the awe of a central event. How the intersecting systems help pull us apart, leaving us vague, drained, docile, soft in our inner discourse, willing to be shaped, to be overwhelmed—easy retreats, half beliefs."

So *Underworld*'s chief flaw is explained by its central theme.

DELILLO'S DEATH-haunted imagination is a strenuous mix of the Catholic Church and the 1960s. In the same way that the counterculture took on the cold war's paranoia and desire for total explanations, his novels (*Underworld* no less than *Mao II*, *Libra*, *White Noise*, or the earlier ones) are irresistibly drawn back into the system, the web of technology, the suspicion of interconnectedness, the vision of control without meaning, to which *Underworld* adds the nuclear fall from innocence. There is no escape—except in language. "Language can be a form of counterhistory," DeLillo wrote recently in the *New York Times Magazine*. Fiction's linguistic qualities "will sooner or later state their adversarial relationship with history."

The statement sounds right and good, and yet it leaves out something crucial, the very thing that's missing from *Underworld*. The individual is left out. The first page tells us, "Longing on a large scale is what makes his-

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tory." *Underworld* gives us history that has subdued longing until its murmurs are barely audible. It may be true that the last half century has flattened out life and made the cold war "the one constant thing," but if so it's disastrous for the novelist. In this context the most revealing comparison one might draw with DeLillo is not to the most often mentioned candidates—Pynchon, Gaddis, Beckett—but to the largely forgotten chronicler of twentieth-century America's first three decades.

JOHN DOS PASSOS's *U.S.A.* trilogy provides a reading experience that reverses *Underworld*'s: it seems as if it ought to be boring but it isn't. The best-known inventions—stream-of-consciousness "Camera Eyes," and "Newsreel" pastiches of headlines, song lyrics, slogans, anonymous quotations—take up a small fraction of the three long volumes. The biographies of famous Americans are, unlike DeLillo's real-life characters, historically accurate. And the bulk of the work—interposed lives of a dozen imaginary men and women from the turn of the century to the stock market crash—is narrated in a deliberately flat, external style that sticks to the quality of the characters' ordinary speech. *U.S.A.* has few of the linguistic and imaginative advantages of *Underworld*. Then why is it so compelling?

The answer, I think, is that Dos Passos shows us the action of history on individuals. His great theme is the rise of American power and the loss of its democratic innocence. We follow his characters—the vagabond Wobbly, the glib public-relations executive, the frigid interior decorator, the naive young radical, the reckless inventor—as they are consumed by the history of their times. The only Americans able to withstand the pressure of popular culture, war hysteria, and feverish moneymaking are a few biographied characters like Robert LaFollette and the Wright Brothers. Dos Passos's imaginary people are not individuals on a heroic scale in the manner of Tolstoy. They are created for their representativeness, characters suited to the early years of the twentieth century when America became a mass democracy. Almost by accident they fall into and are swept along with the main historical currents of their times—strikes, war, Hollywood, advertising, communism, party giving. The pathos is in their acquiescence, and in the sense of wasted longings.

Where *Underworld* asserts our moral condition in the cold war, *U.S.A.* dramatizes our moral transformation in World War I. It shows how an idealistic young ambulance driver gets caught up in the cynical hedonism behind the front lines, how he turns the noble slogans of the American delegation at Versailles into a lucrative career writing ad copy for health foods. Neither he nor any of the other imaginary characters can escape history, but there is clarity and coherence in the process of their dissolution. This gives the trilogy a cumulative power that climaxes in the indictment of war-crazed America at the end of *1919* and in the savage portrait of 1920s capitalism throughout *The Big Money*. History in *U.S.A.* unfolds as Nick Shay wants it to in *Underworld*: "Even if we believe that history is a workwheel powered by human blood—read the speeches of Mussolini—at least we've known the thing together. A single narrative sweep, not ten thousand wisps of disinformation."

Dos Passos was a radical for the first half

WANDERING ON THE WEB?

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of his life, but he was more at home in the aesthetic twenties than the militant thirties. His politics never corresponded to left-wing orthodoxy and eventually swung far to the right. Nonetheless, his belief that history is a "single narrative sweep" concentrates *U.S.A.* into an exceptionally strong moral response. Dos Passos doesn't fictionalize his historical characters because he doesn't need to, because the actual lives of Woodrow Wilson and Randolph Bourne in the frame of an objective history give his narrative its thrust and meaning. By contrast, DeLillo has no cause. There is nothing in *Underworld* comparable to the Sacco and Vanzetti passages in *The Big Money*. Most sentient people today no longer believe that history can be understood objectively, that individual lives follow a coherent course with a bold and simple moral outline, that justice matters to art. The decay of these beliefs is liberating for the imagination, so that DeLillo's J. Edgar Hoover can appear in a leather mask at Truman Capote's Black-and-White ball and indulge a remote erotic thrill. The scene is funny and virtuosic, but like everything else in *Underworld* it's a fragment floating in a literary consciousness that, without a single narrative sweep, has to assemble ten thousand wisps of disinformation. Since readers bring an inescapably linear hope to narrative, any novelist who starts with the idea that historical coherence was lost in the nuclear age will pay a high price. ●

GEORGE PACKER's novel *Central Square* will be published by Graywolf in the fall.

David Bromwich

Romantics and Revolutionaries

THE ROMANTICS: ENGLAND IN A REVOLUTIONARY AGE
by E.P. Thompson
The New Press, 1997 225 pp $25

THIS POSTHUMOUS collection of essays and reviews by E.P. Thompson makes a companion to the last book he completed, *Witness against the Beast*—a study of William Blake's poetry in the light of his possible ancestry among the radical Protestant sect of Muggletonians. There was a great deal in that volume about the Muggletonian creed, and somewhat less about its disciple and allegorist, the author of the greatest English lyrics of imaginative liberty. The depth of the archival engagement drove out, or excluded as a matter of economy, a comparable range of critical inquisitiveness, and yet the result was to give Blake's thinking a credible environment in his age. Much more is known about William Wordsworth, the hero of the present book: he was an inspired historian of his own thoughts and feelings. It might seem that his radical legacy, after the first decade of work in the 1790s, is far more equivocal than Blake's; but Thompson is largely concerned with the nineties, and the portrait that emerges is unexpectedly generous. Wordsworth's later ambivalence toward the leveling democratic sentiments he once espoused is shown to be an imaginative response to a pressure of reaction that overtook English society in the years of war against Napoleon.

It is an invigorating story of resistance, but enough of a story to require villains. Thompson seems to have settled on two. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Wordsworth's collaborator on *Lyrical Ballads* and the friend to whom he dedicated the work he called "the poem about the growth of a poet's mind" (*The Prelude*, as his editors unhappily named it), is treated here with

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a jaundiced skepticism that touches the other side of scorn. Of a scholarly edition of his political essays, Thompson says in the opening sentence of a damning review: "Coleridge earned some part of his bread, books, and drugs as essayist and leader-writer for the *Morning Post* and *Courier*." The Coleridge of the 1790s, a fellow-traveling Unitarian of a perfumed eloquence, enjoyed, within a small circle of associates, a formidable reputation as a political oracle. Fervid in his professions of revolutionary zeal, and as fulsome later in his defection to "legitimate" politics, he was a prototype of the literary apostate who would become a familiar figure in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The leader-writer's canonization as a wisdom-writer in the 1950s and 1960s was successful to an extent that had to be seen to be believed, and Thompson in his anti-Coleridge reviews was working with an unrivaled polemical gift to startle a pious consensus. His final estimate comes close to repeating William Hazlitt's in the essay "On Consistency of Opinion": "I can hardly consider Mr. Coleridge as a deserter from the cause he first espoused, unless one could tell what cause he ever heartily espoused, or what party he ever belonged to, in downright earnest. He has not been inconsistent with himself at different times, but at all times." Whatever Coleridge's attitude of the moment, a wish for acceptance drove him to advertise the pure-heartedness of his motives; but Thompson, a historian as impressed by what people did as by what they said, finds that Coleridge did not think or act in politics to much effect.

A second source of irritation is William Godwin, the visionary of a perfectible society governed on principles of individual judgment and sheer utility. Godwin has always been inviting to ridicule, and satire against him launched some weighty reputations of the 1790s—that of Thomas Malthus, for example, who asked in apparent innocence how a society *could* be perfected if there were too many people. But Godwin, unlike Coleridge, was a political thinker of consistent emphasis with a ponderable impact. His theory of rational reform, in *Political Justice*, converted many younger radicals from an evangelical belief in equality to a faith in the triumph of tolerance and persuasion, and so from a politics of protest to a final trust in "necessity" and "moral arithmetic" and projects of "sincerity" in personal life. There is the start of an argument against Godwin in these pages, but only a start. Distaste for his utopian ideals, and contempt for the moderation with which he promoted them, seems to have lowered Thompson's opinion of anything Godwin set his hand to. He goes so far as to wonder if Godwin's memoir of his wife, Mary Wollstonecraft—a vivid and affectionate book—may not have been "a blunder which exposed her to her enemies."

Sometimes in these essays, one has a sense that the author is striking while the iron is hot, and that it still is hot after two hundred years. The impression of a passionate engagement never weakens; the cost, at this distance in time, is a certain suspension of charity. Both Coleridge and Godwin, in spite of their faults when taken as the exhaustive moral arbiters they wanted to be, command a permanent interest that is allowed to remain hidden here. Godwin was a novelist of enthralling (if morbid) power and Coleridge a poet, in a few lyrics of the nineties, almost as striking and original as Wordsworth. Both had a genuine imagination of evil, not unconnected with their fears of a violent revolution. These traits have no place in Thompson's sense of the period, which is rounded out, in the long essay that concludes the book, with a full-scale portrait of John Thelwall: a radical orator, poet, and essayist, whose consistency and self-sacrifice are made to point a moral against the preachers of gradual improvement or defensive conservatism.

THE ROMANTICS has a more clearly defined plot than most miscellaneous collections, and it is a plot that makes the 1790s sound a good deal like the years 1965-1975. Thompson was conscious of the analogy. In a fine speculative essay published in *Stand* in 1979, unfortunately omitted from the book, he expanded on one aspect of the correspondence—the narrowing of radical politics, in both decades, from practical protest to a theoretically informed quietism punctuated by fantasies of terror. Thompson wrote there of his own suspicion of the idea of "commitment," in relation to literature above all, where

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"the commitment is a disposition or concern in the poet, but what the poet is committed *to* lies ready-made, over there, outside the poet, awaiting appropriation. The poem does not create the commitment, it simply endorses causes which are already known, and which have been disclosed without any poet's exercise." Such a posture leaves "the poet free to choose causes like hats, whether from history's attic or from the radical boutiques of today." By contrast, the poems of Wordsworth and Blake themselves created a way of feeling. Wordsworth is praised again, in the essays that compose *The Romantics*, as an active reformer who migrated inward only in the sense that he became a revolutionist of feelings—a moral historian of people forced by neglect or ill fortune to the very edge of society, the people about whom he wrote poems like "The Idiot Boy" and "The Mad Mother" and "The Female Vagrant." Thompson honors Wordsworth still more as an autobiographer—the author of a dramatic inquest into the motives for thoughts and feelings nobody knew were common until he discovered them, and an all-important witness to the energy given to every social idealism by the French Revolution.

The poetry with which Wordsworth is thus associated does not speak "Of joy in widest commonalty spread" or "Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower." It is the work of a lonelier man, less certain that he can ever know the truth about the bonds between himself and others, yet sure that the good of life must be to search for them. The recognition that such barely articulate sentiments might be a subject for poetry did not come to Wordsworth early or easily. It belongs to a particular phase of his mid-twenties—after his return from France, where he had left behind his lover and their child—when he felt like a man stranded in a foreign place. That place was his "home," England, where, listening in church to the prayers for victory against France, he felt himself the only voice unable to join; and where, looking among his friends and former allies, he seemed to see "utter loss of hope itself/ And things to hope for." Here for the first time, walking on the public roads without a thought of livelihood, he

> saw into the depth of human souls,
> Souls that appear to have no depth at all
> To vulgar eyes.

Thompson reminds us of the greatness of the discovery: not the souls of the dispossessed are vulgar, but the eyes that, meeting theirs, cannot imagine the depth they may hold.

When first broached in these terms, in 1968, Thompson's appreciation was unfashionable because it chose a political reason for admiring much of Wordsworth's poetry. The choice has since become unfashionable for another reason. To admire a writer as unregenerately individualist as Wordsworth goes against a prejudice of the dominant line of scholarship that is broadly called "historicist." Wordsworth's politics, it is now argued, stopped being radical at the very moment that his poetry turned ambitious. The view has had some remarkable side effects. The part of Wordsworth's career that is salvageable on both political and poetic grounds has been whittled down to three years of novice work ending in 1795. Thompson's is a more generous reading. He speaks of an extended work of reflection in which Wordsworth's hopes, without giving way to disenchantment, were strongly qualified by self-questioning:

> It is exactly within this conflict—the moment when the received culture was challenged, all conventions were called into question, and the great humanist affirmations were abroad, but when sharp experience had shown that the florid periods of the platform Jacobin or the abstract periods of the *Philosophes* were inadequate—it is exactly within this conflict that the great romantic impulse came to maturity.

This is said with a respect born of deep knowledge, and not much colored by hero-worship—the tone that carried conviction in all of Thompson's historical writings.

One may still wonder how far Wordsworth's poetic radicalism was coherent with his political radicalism. The two impulses need not be interpreted as contradictory; but did they work so perceptibly in concert? There is a rousing passage in one of Hazlitt's essays, where he speaks as the unrepentant Jacobin of English letters and says that *the poets belong to us, so long as they are poets.*

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By "us" he meant the radical side in politics. They die as poets, such is the inference, before they die as radicals; once they have gone bitter, of course they will swing toward arbitrary power, but it does not matter: we have had the best of them. I have always liked this passage for its nerve, but I have often wondered about it. How could he be so sure? Though Thompson draws out Wordsworth's radical period to a full two decades, fundamentally he agrees with Hazlitt. He is able to see as acts of democratic imagination such works of the early 1800s as the *Sonnets on Liberty* and Wordsworth's tract on Spanish independence, *The Convention of Cintra*. But some way in the background, one can make out the force of a guiding maxim that revolutionary passion and poetic invention followed a single path. Did they actually do so in Wordsworth's career?

While he was in France, for thirteen months of 1791 and 1792, he wrote little but draft materials for *An Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches*—poems in conventional eighteenth-century modes, which he published mainly to have something to show. His first years back in England, 1793 and 1794, appear to have brought him close to despair. He looked back now, with a justified self-distrust, at his fantasies of quelling the Terror by prodigies of oratory or showing his good faith by service as a volunteer in the revolutionary army. At the end of this period he begins to write poems about persons as isolated as himself—beggars, drifters, madwomen, convicts—and with these portraits as if by accident comes the recognition of a purpose of his poetry. These subjects and his sense of their importance created the scandal of the *Lyrical Ballads* on its first appearance. The author was looked on as a primitive—a reputation he refused to disown, which would stay with him for another two decades. Yet there was no didactic message in the poems, apart from a hatred of passive suffering. Wordsworth wrote them because he was thrown back on himself. The shock of the strangeness or sympathy that one can still feel in reading them did owe much to an intense experience of the revolution and the bafflement in which that experience trailed off. That is not yet to say that the motive of the poetry is an idealism that harmonizes with the popular movements of the 1790s.

Wordsworth, I think, had as much feeling for individuals, and as much distrust of people in the aggregate, as it is possible to hold in a single mind. Of the ideals of the revolution, *liberté*, *egalité*, *fraternité*, his evocations of equality are the most stirring and unpredictable. Liberty he felt he had experienced to its depth in childhood, though he was well versed in an earlier republican tradition, as the *Sonnets on Liberty* acknowledge. Of fraternity, he was a most sparing witness. Its appearances in *The Prelude* are remarkable because they are fleeting. The longest glimpse occurs in Book Six, in a recollection of the summer of 1790; on tour with a friend, he passed through the countryside of France on the way to the Alps:

> It was our lot
> To land at Calais on the very eve
> Of that great federal day; and there we saw
> In a mean city, and among a few,
> How bright a face is worn when joy of one
> Is joy of tens of millions.

And so it goes on, exuberantly, for almost thirty lines. But this is the only image of its kind in *The Prelude*; there are scarcely another thirty such lines in all of Wordsworth. Could he have become the poet he did become and yet have maintained the sense of *lived* solidarity as a ground note of his imaginings?

It is a tricky business to criticize a working premise of a scholar one has greatly admired, in an area where he went far to shape one's own interests and perceptions, and I am in that position regarding Thompson. Not only the essay "Disenchantment or Default?," reprinted here, but "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century" in *Customs in Common*, and the chapters on the treason trials of 1794 and on the Luddite protests in *The Making of the English Working Class*, as much as the writings of any historian practically gave me the eyes with which I look at an entire period. Yet, on the question of solidarity and its manifestations in the action of a crowd, Thompson seems to me to have been liable to betray his own perceptions. He needed to see a warm disposition here in the

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writers or political actors he admired, and would often cite, as proof of frozen affections, the absence of crowd-sympathy in those he singled out as deplorable. In the present book, Godwin's belief that the disorder of popular assemblies is an impediment to reasoned discussion is said to exhibit the "arrogant vices" of his class. Somehow Wordsworth is spared the force of this criticism. But a prejudice in favor of the crowd is as remote from Wordsworth as any feeling could be; whereas, with Thompson, it was a usual assumption that persons acting in a corps, an organized or spontaneous group with the stated or inferable aim of protesting an injustice, *might* of course do wrong, but so long as their ends were benevolent, complaints of their violence were more suspect than the violence itself. That a crowd might have a tendency to commit wickedness, because each member is less answerable than each person would be separately: this was, to him, an abstract truth doubtless familiar from liberal theory, but an observation of no practical interest.

Wordsworth's most rooted intuitions went the other way. In the preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, he warned of "the increasing accumulation of men in cities, where the uniformity of their occupations produces a craving for extraordinary incident." That was one kind of crowd. Another kind is described in Book Ten of *The Prelude*, which deals with the Terror of 1793 and 1794:

> Domestic carnage now filled the whole year
> With feast-days; old men from the chimney-nook,
> The maiden from the bosom of her love,
> The mother from the cradle of her babe,
> The warrior from the field—all perished, all—
> Friends, enemies, of all parties, ages, ranks,
> Head after head, and never heads enough
> For those that bade them fall. They found their joy,
> They made it, proudly eager as a child,
> (If light desires of innocent little ones
> May with such heinous appetites be compared),
> Pleased in some open field to exercise
> A toy that mimics with revolving wings
> The motion of a wind-mill; though the air
> Do of itself blow fresh, and make the vanes
> Spin in his eyesight, *that* contents him not,
> But, with the plaything at arm's length, he sets
> His front against the blast, and runs amain,
> That it may whirl the faster.

It is a shocking passage because it explains the wildness of the Terror not as an effect of political machinations, or the distemper of a crowd gone wrong, but as an excited exertion of people getting together for a kind of pleasure. They deploy the guillotine with the zest of children running into the wind to set a toy windmill going faster—as if the appetite of the mob were a habit that might be learned, and might come to seem natural over months and years.

THE VICTIMS of the revolution, on the other hand, Wordsworth constantly imagines as persons in solitude; even in his dreams, he cannot help identifying his fate with theirs—"Each in his separate cell, or penned in crowds/ For sacrifice, and struggling with forced mirth/ And levity in dungeons, where the dust was laid with tears." At that time, he recalls, so acute were his own feelings of guilt and impotence, he seemed to himself like one who "strove to plead/ Before unjust tribunals,—with a voice/ Labouring, a brain confounded, and a sense,/ Death-like, of treacherous desertion, felt/ In the last place of refuge—my own soul." The second of these passages is quoted by Thompson, with an oddly forced interpretation. It appears in *The Prelude* in close succession with the first, and both seem parts of a phantasmagoria of France in those heady months. Yet Thompson surmises that the setting of the lines may actually be London, and that the scene of "each in his separate cell," like the terrorist plot of Wordsworth's tragedy *The Borderers*, has lurking behind it a domestic scandal, an abrupt disappointment with the rationalism of Godwin and his circle. Wordsworth had his own quarrel with Godwin—who had placed a theoretical ban on feelings as a motive for action—and he saw the possible abuses of such a philosophy in the hands of malevolent but "rational" persons. But, pretty clearly, another consider-

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ation has forced this reading. Thompson has moved the setting from France to England because he could more fully admire the lines if they looked like something other than a depiction of a revolutionary people bent on murderous collective action.

His reluctance to place a crowd, or a people, or "the people" in an unflattering light, is not the same as refusal. It does not lead to a denial of realities so much as it leads to euphemism. Consider the essay in *Customs in Common* on "Rough Music" or "charivari"—the folk custom of mocking or shaming, hounding or mobbing a chosen victim according to a picturesque protocol, with a real or fancied social grudge to back the action of the crowd. Rough music is a term of art with historians. It is also a piece of aestheticizing understatement, and Thompson's essay closes with an artful escape clause and a generalized qualification. Such actions of the folk are among the rituals of "social self-control," an admirable thing by comparison with discipline from above, and to that extent rough music is a practice to which "one may assent." But, having understood the symbolic meaning of social self-control, we must not expect the morality it enforces to be "nice" or "cosy":

> It is only as nice and as tolerant as the prejudices and norms of the folk allow. Some forms of rough music disappeared from history in shadowy complicity with bigotry, jingoism and worse. In Bavaria, the last manifestations of *haberfeldtreiben* were linked to mafia-like blackmail, anti-semitism and, in the final stage, to ascendant Nazism. For some of its victims, the coming of a distanced (if alienated) Law and a bureaucratised police must have been felt as a liberation from the tyranny of one's "own."

This argumentative rider, as Thompson calls it, has an effect of peculiar contortion. Why pretend that the expectation of substantial justice is a mere fastidious wish that manners be nice? What is under discussion is right and wrong and what is evaded is the judgment whether there is a standard of right and wrong outside the will of the people. Again, is there any distinction in experience between the ironically capitalized Law and what people ordinarily mean by the rule of law? And by what divination are just "some" of the victims imagined as likely to be sickened by the attacks of their tormentors?

It is an awkward moment but a prominent one, at the end of an essay that concludes an ambitious and scrupulous book. Such determined unshockability in the cause of the people involves a kind of juggling to which Thompson would never have consented on behalf of a person. And the rider is further reduced to a parenthesis, in a curious sentence of *The Romantics*, where a possible extenuation is found for the avoidance of crowds by educated reformers of the 1790s: "(To be fair, they had good reason to be cautious of the crowd, as they looked back on the Priestley Riots in Birmingham and countless burnings of Tom Paine in effigy.)" Who would guess from that capsule-portrait the savagery of the Church-and-King mob that in a three-day frenzy burned down the house and laboratory of Joseph Priestley (a chemist and a radical pamphleteer), destroyed manuscripts and records of research covering half a lifetime, and, by the persistence of their threats, compelled Priestley to flee and resettle in London?

John Thelwall, the nearest Thompson can come to a popular counterpart for Wordsworth, brings back the same question of sympathy with the crowd, since he was a poet but also a demagogue, in the mainly positive sense of an altruistic leader of people who have as yet no voice in government. He remains a figure of charm and dignity. Once, as Coleridge recalled, "we were sitting in a beautiful recess in the Quantocks, when I said to him, 'Citizen John, this is a fine place to talk treason in!'—'Nay! Citizen Samuel,' replied he, 'it is rather a place to make a man forget that there is any necessity for treason!' " Never has the posturing of a parlor radical been more delicately put down. Thelwall's later life in Wales, pestering the government however he could, while writing articles on farming, a fragment of a novel, a book of "poems chiefly written in retirement," makes a symmetrical contrast with Wordsworth's gradual ascent to the laureateship. He is exemplary as a radical who was hunted by the anti-Jacobin press, and by successive ministries, and who still went on resisting. But Thelwall's political rhetoric has

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dated as badly as Coleridge's; and even Thompson can say of him: "Thelwall was utterly sorry for himself, and not afraid to show it." Persecution does nothing good for anyone; its sufferings do not immortalize the persecuted.

As it happens, Thelwall was treated once to the mercies of charivari, and Thompson's discussion of the episode is, in its directness of statement, greatly superior to the riders and parentheses quoted above. When he passed through Wisbech, a seaport town, "his lecture was attended by a 'rough music' led by a detachment of the military." The sentence has a Swiftian accuracy: we can plainly see that the roughness was real and the music a blare of jeers and bruising assaults; the detachment of the military were anything but detached, and they were not there to attend the lecture. The knockabout irony has a home in the career of Thelwall, who was in his element when he fought against such tactics. It could not have a place in Wordsworth's career. His antipathy to leaders was as pronounced as his scorn for the led, and that may have been a reason why, unlike Southey and Coleridge and many other contemporaries, he never passed through a phase of idolatry of Robespierre. As his hero of the revolution, Wordsworth chose instead the leader of a lost cause, Toussaint L'Ouverture. One cannot help feeling that Thompson approved of the choice—that it was part of what made him care for Wordsworth all along, even if he does not say so. He shared with the poet he celebrates a frank belief that the noble dead of every class need not be a lost cause forever. This confidence was unshakable and infectious, and it is alive in the last of his books. ●

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James T. Campbell

What Is Africa to Me?

OUT OF AMERICA:
A BLACK MAN CONFRONTS AFRICA
by Keith B. Richburg
Basic Books, 1997 263 pp $24

IN 1923, A THEN-little-known poet named Langston Hughes embarked for Africa. Just twenty-one years old, Hughes had produced the epochal "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" two years before, in which he traced a continuous river of black history from the Nile and the Congo to the "muddy bosom" of the Mississippi. Now he resolved to trace that river to its source. He signed on to the crew of a tramp steamer and set sail for the Windward Coast, jettisoning all his books (except for a cherished copy of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*) in a final dockside ceremony.

The voyage left an enduring imprint on Hughes's poetry, but at the cost of certain romantic preconceptions. In his autobiography, *The Big Sea*, he recalled one of his first encounters with Africans. Expatiating on the shared predicament of black people across the globe, he was dismayed to discover that his auditors considered him "a white man." This assessment, he learned, had only partly to do with his straight hair and copper skin.

> One of the Kru men from Liberia, working on our ship, who had seen many American Negroes, of various shades and colors, and knew much of America, explained to me.
>
> "Here," he said, "on the West Coast, there are not many colored people—people of mixed blood—and those foreign colored men who are here come mostly as missionaries, to teach us something, since they

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think we know nothing. Or they come from the West Indies, as clerks and administrators in the colonial governments, to help carry out the white man's laws. So the Africans call them all white men."

"But I am not white," I said.

"You are not black either," the Kru man said simply. "There is a man of my color." And he pointed to George, the pantryman, who protested loudly.

"Don't point at me," George said. "I'm from Lexington, Kentucky, U.S.A. And no African blood, nowhere."

"You black," said the Kru man.

"I can part my hair," said George, "and it ain't nappy."

But to tell the truth, George shaved a part in his hair every other week, since the comb wouldn't work. The Kru man knew this, so they both laughed loudly, for George's face was as African as Africa.

This "comedy of misrecognition"—the phrase is critic Ken Warren's—contains a host of lessons. Hughes's voyage, indeed his entire career, attests to Africa's pervasiveness in the intellectual and imaginative life of African Americans. George's anxious disavowal reminds us that, historically, the majority of black Americans have not shared the poet's pan-African convictions. And the Kru man's matter-of-fact explanation provides the most important lesson of all: that Africans have ideas and assumptions of their own, which often have little to do with the preconceptions of Western visitors, black or white.

Hughes was neither the first nor the last African-American to learn these lessons. Since the early years of the nineteenth century, when the first shiploads of African-American emigrants disembarked in what is today Sierra Leone, thousands of black Americans have traveled back to Africa, retracing the passage of millions of African captives. The complexity of African-American life is captured in the diversity of those who have made the journey: sailors, missionaries, fortune hunters, artists, teachers, and, more recently, diplomats, Peace Corps volunteers, journalists, and tourists. Hundreds have published their observations and reflections, producing a virtual sub-genre of that most self-reflective of literary forms, the African traveler's account.

KEITH B. RICHBURG's *Out of America: A Black Man Confronts Africa* represents the latest contribution to this tradition. Based on Richburg's three years as African bureau chief of the *Washington Post*, *Out of America* is, like Hughes's *The Big Sea*, a tale of disillusionment, but one rendered not in wistful irony but in an outpouring of rage and horror. Assailing what he calls the myth of "Mother Africa," Richburg sketches a landscape of misery and senseless slaughter, full of people who "look like me," yet whose behavior and wretchedness he finds unfathomable. By the end of the book he is unable to bring himself even to type the phrase "African American."

Under any circumstances, such an account would stir controversy. Appearing today, at a time when millions of black Americans despair of the promise of America and look to Africa for identity and succor, the book has ignited a firestorm. Columnists and commentators have lashed out at Richburg, branding him a lackey, a self-hater (equating disdain for Africa with "self-hatred" is a venerable tradition in black nationalist thought), a brainwashed black man. A few reviewers have come to the book's defense, commending Richburg for speaking unpopular truths, including the truth of African-Americans' essential Americanness. In the months since its publication, *Out of America* has become a touchstone in America's ongoing race wars, joining the ranks of such books as Shelby Steele's *The Content of Our Character* and Charles Murray and Richard Herrnstein's notorious *The Bell Curve*. The irony, of course, is that the book is—or purports to be—not about America at all, but about Africa.

By his own account, Richburg makes an unlikely pilgrim. The son of a union official, he grew up in an integrated neighborhood of Detroit. He did not have "a particularly 'black' childhood," he writes, "just a childhood, an average American childhood." He was six when the Civil Rights Act erased the last vestiges of *de jure* segregation. He was nine during the cataclysmic 1967 Detroit riot, which spurred white flight from the central city and trans-

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formed his childhood neighborhood. He remembers the riot because his father took him to see the flames. "I want you to see this," he told him. "I want you to see what black people are doing to their own neighborhood." Three decades later, there is more than a hint of that sentiment in Richburg's portrayal of Africa.

Coming of age in the wake of the civil rights movement, Richburg experienced the blessings and unexpected burdens of racial integration. As a student at a suburban private school, where his parents enrolled him after the riot, he had mostly white friends, most of whom had only the "vaguest sense" where he lived. At the University of Michigan, he resisted what he calls the "voluntary resegregation" of black students or, more prosaically, "the dining hall test." He became a master of "not taking sides," insisting, in the words of Martin Luther King, Jr., that an individual should be judged not by the "color of his skin" but by "the content of his character." He continued to steer to that lodestar during his years on the *Post*'s city desk, angrily rejecting suggestions that he should eschew criticism of local black officials in the interests of his "race."

Aside from one or two undergraduate courses, Richburg gave Africa a wide berth. When his editors offered him the Africa post—assuming, incorrectly in the event, that a black reporter would have an easier time reporting from Africa—he felt "dread," dimly aware that the assignment might at last "force me to choose which side of the dining hall I would sit on." After some hesitation, he accepted, having been assured by various "well-meaning academics and Africa specialists" that with the end of the cold war and the triumph of free-market ideology the continent stood on the verge of an economic and political renaissance.

Richburg declares his disillusionment in the book's opening sentences. He stands alongside the Kigera River in Tanzania, watching bodies float down from the killing fields of Rwanda. Bloated and discolored, they tumble over a waterfall, catching in the crags. Most of the bodies are naked. Many are bound hand and foot. Some are disemboweled or missing limbs. Richburg times the flow: one every minute or two, sometimes two or three at a time, a tiny trickle from an incomprehensible slaughter. He comes away with a lesson, which becomes one of his book's motifs: "This is Africa, and in Africa you don't count the bodies."

From that grisly beginning, we follow Richburg across the continent, leapfrogging from crisis to crisis: to Somalia, graveyard of George Bush's "New World Order"; to a refugee camp in eastern Zaire, where the bodies of victims of a cholera epidemic are stacked like cordwood; to Liberia, where marijuana-smoking soldiers, some just ten or eleven years old, wield AK-47s and "don women's wigs, pantyhouse, even Donald Duck Halloween masks before committing some of the world's most unspeakable atrocities. . . ." Along the way we meet a rogues' gallery of "buffoons and misfits," perhaps best symbolized by Zaire's Mobutu Sese Seko, who accumulated a personal fortune of billions of dollars while presiding over his resource-rich country's dissolution. Again and again, Richburg asks himself: How can such things—how can such people—exist in the twentieth century? And with each new horror comes a whisper: There but for the grace of God go I.

Needless to say, Richburg has little patience with the current African vogue in black American life, with Afrocentrism, Kwanzaa, kente cloth, and all the people who "hanker after Mother Africa, as if Africa is the answer to all the problems they face at home in America." And he is frankly contemptuous of the "self-proclaimed black spokesmen" who come to Africa and pronounce on its problems from the vantage of presidential receptions and "five star hotels." He describes with telling effect a 1993 black "summit" in Libreville, Gabon, where a bevy of black American leaders heaped praise on some of Africa's most notorious military dictators. (Nigeria's Ibrahim Babangida, who a few months later would annul the results of a national election, sending his country into a spiral of violence and repression, was extolled by Jesse Jackson as "one of the great leader-servants of the modern world.") When asked by Richburg about the suppression of democracy and human rights in countries like Nigeria,

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delegates became "defensive, nervous and inarticulate." "We cannot and should not force them to undergo a metamorphosis in seconds," Virginia governor Douglas Wilder explained. "Our job is not to interfere. . . ." Imagine the outcry, Richburg says, if a white southern governor in 1993 had issued such a statement about apartheid South Africa.

THE CLIMAX of the book comes at Goree Island, off the coast of Senegal, one of the main transit points for Africans bound for New World slavery. In recent years, Goree has become a pilgrimage site for diaspora blacks, a religious shrine, eliciting profound reflection and, often, convulsive emotion. Richburg arrives "hoping to feel that same kind of spiritual connection," but none comes. He experiences "revulsion at the horrendous crime of slavery"—he compares the site to Auschwitz—but "little personal connection or pain." What bubbles up instead, "so unspeakable, so unthinkable" that he recoils from it, is thankfulness—thankfulness to the "ancestor who made it out," thankfulness that he is an American and not one of the "nameless, faceless, anonymous bodies" cascading over the falls in Tanzania.

Richburg anticipates objections to his account, and he adopts the standard defense of reporters and travel writers: "I've been there . . . I've seen it." Again and again, he resorts to direct address, usually at the grimmest moments in his account. "Is this depressing you?" he asks. "Do you want to put this book down now? No, please, press on . . . I want you to walk with me, hold my hand as we step over the rotting corpses . . ." The echo of Hemingway's classic story "A Natural History of the Dead" is unmistakable; and, as with Hemingway, the implication is that one is being shown unalloyed facts, and that it would be somehow cowardly to demur.

It is a compelling technique, but does it exonerate the text of charges of bias and partiality? If recent studies of travel writing have taught us anything, it is that "seeing" is not so simple a thing, that even "open-minded" travelers, as Richburg claims to be, view the world through specific cultural and historical lenses. This is especially the case when confronting a place as drenched in myth and stereotype as Africa, which has always figured in the Western imagination as a kind of netherworld, dark, stagnant, and irrational. Indeed, the very concept of "the West" crystallized out of encounters with primitive "Others," who purportedly embodied all the dark qualities that "enlightened" Westerners did not.

The fact that Richburg carries a black skin in no way inoculates him from this influence. On the contrary, there are passages in *Out of America* worthy of even the most lurid nineteenth-century "Dark Continent" account. "Tribalism" seethes through Africa, and "the potential for a violent implosion is never far from the surface." The continent is a "jungle," a "quagmire," a "breeding ground for myriad viruses, germs, plagues, parasites, bacteria and infections that most people in the West probably never knew existed." (Richburg's description of his own phobia about AIDS is reminiscent of colonial representations of Africa as "the white man's graveyard.") Club-wielding Hutu militiamen are not "fully evolved human beings" but "cavemen," living in a "sick version" of Fred Flintstone's Bedrock. So bleak is the prospect that Richburg finds himself feeling unexpected empathy for the illusory world of white South Africans: "It's an illusion because no matter how 'Westernized' their lives seem, they live in Africa, and I know what darkness lurks out there, beyond the fence, beyond the borders, further north, in the 'real Africa.' "

So powerful is this inherited discourse that it seems to blind Richburg to the complexities of his own account—complexities that suggest a far more nuanced picture of African life and character than the book as a whole allows. He concedes Africa's dizzying geographical, cultural and linguistic diversity, though it rarely inhibits him from offering sweeping generalizations. He acknowledges that the appearance of "anarchy" and "chaos" in Africa often reflects an outsider's failure to grasp "the norms and rules and codes of conduct" in unfamiliar situations. He suggests some of the ways in which foreign correspondents—a thoroughly sodden and cynical lot in his portrayal—shape a collective "story" about the continent, a story that inevitably highlights certain aspects of life

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(killing and dying, preeminently) while excluding others. He alludes to the "heroism, honor and dignity" of "ordinary, anonymous people," and to the "endless little acts of kindness" he encountered everywhere he traveled in Africa. Yet ultimately the force of such insights and qualifications is swallowed up in the author's "rage" and "overarching despair."

The limits of Richburg's vision come most sharply into focus when he asks why Africa is in the shape it is. "Is there something in the nature of Africans that makes them more prone to corruption?" he muses. Whence comes this "maddening propensity to accept all kinds of suffering while waiting for some outside deliverance"? "Is there some flaw in the African culture?" After three years on the continent, Richburg is unable to answer his own questions or, more important, to see why they are badly framed. The best he can offer is a warmed-over version of "culture of poverty" theory. Africans, he suggests, lack "discipline," a product, perhaps, of having evolved in a bounteous environment. (The idea that Africa's tropical climate represented a "poisoned gift" was a standard nineteenth-century trope; in fact, the majority of the continent is not arable.) The system of polygamy, combined with a "free-and-easy attitude toward sex"—promiscuity, he tells us, is "almost a way of life" in Africa—induces Africans to produce children without considering whether they can "afford" them. This unpromising culture has been further compromised, he writes, by decades on the "aid dollar dole," courtesy of the continent's ostensible "friends" in the West.

If all this sounds familiar, it should, for it is precisely the same battery of charges—indiscipline, promiscuity, lack of initiative and forethought—that is adduced to explain the poverty and "pathology" of America's black ghettoes. For the most part, the linkage seems to be unconscious, but Richburg occasionally makes it explicit, arguing, for example, that African leaders have come to view foreign aid "the same way many American blacks see government assistance programs as a kind of entitlement of birth. In both cases, you're left with black people wallowing in a safety net of dependency." The problem is exacerbated, again in both cases, by the "hypocrisy" and "double standards" of "so-called black leaders" and their white liberal fellow travelers, who refuse to place the onus of responsibility where it belongs: on Africans and African-Americans themselves. Richburg's summation of the abortive U.N. intervention in Somalia reads like an epitaph for Great Society liberalism: "No one ever calculated what you do next if the people you come to help have no interest in being saved."

Seen in this light, the controversy ignited by the book assumes a dismally familiar shape. In rejecting structural explanations for Africa's plight as "lies" and "excuses" for Africans' own deficiencies, in alleging a "conspiracy of silence" to hide the sordid truth, Richburg arrogates to himself the mantle of courageous iconoclast, just as conservative writers such as Thomas Sowell and Charles Murray have done on the subject of America's so-called ghetto "underclass." What such a claim overlooks is the fact that his analysis, however anathema to African-American leaders and some white liberals, is coin of the realm to the vast majority of white Americans, who are only too ready to believe that Africa, like America's urban ghettoes, is a lost cause, a write-off, a black hole.

The response of the book's myriad critics has been scarcely more edifying. Rather than attack the substantive flaws of the book—its utter partiality, its relentless self-absorption, the virtual exclusion of African voices—critics have trained their sights on Richburg himself, denouncing him as a race traitor, even as an apologist for slavery. Few seem to realize that such attacks only lend credence to Richburg's pose as courageous dissident. Fewer still stop to wonder what it says about American society that one black man's repudiation of Africa seems so profoundly threatening to so many.

WHAT MAKES all this particularly frustrating is the fact that *Out of America*, for all its egregious flaws, poses many of the central questions of our age. The Rwandan genocide, the implosions of Zaire, Liberia, and Somalia, do represent fundamental challenges to the moral and political imagination of the international community, however misleading it may be to ascribe some essentially African character to the car-

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nage. How ought nations like the United States respond? In an intellectual climate attuned to difference and to the demands of cultural relativism, what is the standing of erstwhile "universal" values, such as equality, democracy, and human rights? In what ways are we in the West responsible—in both senses of the term—for Africans' plight? Alas, neither Richburg nor his critics seem to have much to offer on these vital questions.

Watching this sorry "debate" unfold, one is struck by many things: by the contemporary tendency to collapse all political issues into questions of personal identity, by the temptations of posturing and preaching to the choir, by the yawning racial chasm that continues to cleave American society. One is also struck by the way in which Africa remains, more than 180 years after the end of the transatlantic slave trade and more than forty years after the onset of decolonization, a specter in the Western imagination, less a place in its own right than a screen onto which all of us, black and white, friend and foe, project our own dreams and discontents. ●

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Michael Kazin

Left with the Arts

THE CULTURAL FRONT:
THE LABORING OF AMERICAN CULTURE
IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY
by Michael Denning
Verso, 1996 556 pp $25, cloth; $20, paper

IN 1950, Theodor Geisel (Dr. Seuss) published *Yertle the Turtle*. A brief summary of this illustrated story in rhyming couplets for readers who may not have a copy on hand: The happy king of a pondful of contented reptiles suddenly gets infected with big ambitions. "I'm ruler," explains Yertle, "of all that I see./ But I don't see enough./ That's the trouble with me." He commands his turtle-subjects to stack themselves up into a throne. From his perch atop their shells, Yertle imagines himself to be "king of the trees" and "king of the bees."

However, like many another monarch, Yertle is undone by his hubris. A "plain little turtle" named Mack protests in the name of the terrapin masses: "I know, up on top you are seeing great sights./ But down at the bottom we, too, should have rights./ We turtles can't stand it./ Our shells will all crack!" Yertle, enraged, tells Mack he has no "right to talk to the world's highest turtle." Mack counters with an eloquent burp that upsets the throne. Yertle falls, snout-first, into the mud.

Dr. Seuss gets only a passing mention in Michael Denning's otherwise splendidly informative book, *The Cultural Front*. But both Yertle the Turtle and his creator, a staff cartoonist during the 1940s for the left-wing daily *PM*, seem to bolster Denning's main argument: During the Great Depression and World War II, the left did much to transform the popular arts in the United States. A pro-worker, ethnically pluralist sensibility the author dubs "CIO culture" permeated and enriched American film, theatre, music, painting, journalism, and fiction.

This sensibility, Denning maintains, survived and even prospered long after the Red Scare and early cold war had all but extinguished the left as a political movement. For evidence, he points to some of the greatest works of Billie Holiday ("Strange Fruit" and "God Bless the Child"), of Orson Welles (*Citizen Kane* and *Touch of Evil*), of Bob Dylan (his songs of homage to Woody Guthrie and the

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album *The Times They Are A-Changin'*), and to the ongoing discovery of folk traditions. Denning further credits "CIO culture" with mounting the first sustained challenge to racist thinking in the twentieth century—ushering in a new age of (public) racial tolerance and paving the way for the black and Chicano freedom movements. Every contemporary leftist thus becomes a child of the cultural front.

It's a bold thesis. Denning, who teaches American studies at Yale, wants to affirm and elaborate the same radical vision cherished by left-wing artists of that era. This requires him to confront the disdain of posterity—in particular, the idea that Popular Frontists were a band of maudlin populists in thrall to Soviet tyranny. "To this day," wrote Sean Wilentz in 1985, "when I hear the words Pop Front I think of atrocious art." Where critics like Wilentz and his forerunners at *Partisan Review* and elsewhere saw little but vulgar melodrama, Denning discovers stimulating plots and moving evocations of universal themes. He's far more convincing, I think, as a revisionist historian of the left than as an interpreter of the larger impact of "CIO culture." But he has produced a rich, formidable study that demands a close reading—and often rewards it.

Although Denning is a leading figure on the cultural studies left, he manages to avoid most of its stylistic sinkholes. On a few occasions, quotations from the likes of Jameson and Gramsci, and Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall, clot the manuscript. But as a historian, Denning redeems himself in two ways. First, he gives us lapidary portraits of the engagé artists themselves—both as social types and as individuals. Second, he rediscovers unappreciated writers and visual craftspeople. Read Denning to learn about the left-wing animators who made Disney's landmark films; about a class-conscious feminist named Elizabeth Hawes who wrote with insight and wit about both women's fashion and wartime factory work; and about Carey McWilliams, who, years before he became editor of the *Nation*, wrote pathbreaking studies about the multiracial cauldron of the Far West.

The breadth of this output underscores Denning's conviction that far more united the cultural left in the thirties and forties than divided it. Independent radicals and Marxist party members alike were building a new kind of working-class culture whose appeal transcended doctrinal conflicts. Of course, events in Spain and especially in Moscow inflamed factional conflict. But the cause of industrial labor narrowed the gaps between artistic Trotskyists, Stalinists, and social democrats. And personal connections usually did the rest.

That is why Denning identifies the culture he seeks to restore with the CIO rather than with the Popular Front, eternally branded, rightly or wrongly, as a communist masquerade. Denning shows that an individual producer of CIO culture—whether writer or painter, playwright or actress—who belonged to one party could still thrive creatively with artists from a supposedly enemy camp. Thus, the two-year run of Marc Blitzstein's celebrated musical *Pins and Needles*, in which New York garment workers—some communist, some socialist—sang and joked about their own lives, coincided with the years of the Nazi-Soviet Pact. Yet former cast members recall only "a lot of left-wing kids" instead of warring factions.

Unfortunately, when he turns to interpreting the more memorable works that emerged from the cultural left, Denning tends to make the same error as did many Pop Frontists themselves: he confuses quality with social relevance. Writers' origins and choice of themes tend to overshadow the virtues or defects of their work.

TAKE THE long chapter on *U.S.A.*, the modernist trilogy by John Dos Passos that is seldom read today. Denning begins with a good question: why does this novel, once regarded as "the master narrative" for the entire Pop Front generation, now seem rather quaint—unlike novels by other depression-era leftists, like *Native Son* and *Call It Sleep*? Dos Passos's angry rejection of communism during the Spanish Civil War and his subsequent migration to *National Review* are just a small part of the answer.

For Denning, the waning of interest in *U.S.A.* is essentially due to the social background of its author. Dos Passos, he points out, was not struggling, like Richard Wright, Henry

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Roth, and many other writers of the thirties, to make art out of a ghetto life he had recently escaped. He was the son of a financier and had graduated from Harvard. And his masterpiece, for all its experimental technique, looked backward to what Denning calls "the Lincoln republic" that emerged triumphant from the Civil War and then got betrayed by monopolists and sycophantic publicists for "the big money."

The most vivid characters in *U.S.A.* are villains, rich or becoming so. None is an immigrant or the child of one. And Denning notices that nearly every critical juncture in Dos Passos's novel turns on a cocktail party—a space filled up "with ill-assorted people who really hate each other," as one character remarks before killing herself.

Denning argues that a narrative so rife with decay and despair could not retain its power after young novelists of far different heritage began to publish their own kind of stories. The central genre of left fiction became what he usefully dubs "the ghetto pastoral"—tales of growing up in plebeian neighborhoods filled with class pathos and ethnic passion. Two-thirds of a century later, "tales of how *our* half lives"—their politics absent or implied rather than overt—can still fill theaters and land a spot on the best-seller list. Witness the success of Mario Puzo, Martin Scorsese, and Howard Fast (who, in his communist days, turned out didactic historical novels like *Citizen Tom Paine*). The world Dos Passos memorialized in *U.S.A.* cannot be resurrected.

Denning's account of ethnic progression in American literature has some merit as social history. The Mafia epic speaks to Americans now in a way sagas by Protestant leftists like Dos Passos, Dreiser, and Hemingway do not. But as literary theory, Denning's brand of Marxism is only a slight improvement over the older and cruder variety in which class consciousness was all.

If nostalgic narratives of desiccated cultures so quickly lose their audience, why do Proust and James still captivate readers? The main problem with *U.S.A.* is that Dos Passos was *too* "political" a writer; his characters are mere bundles of attributes any good leftist of the day despised. Their individual tragedies are easily forgotten, while the swift decline of Proust's Charlus, a narcissistic aristocrat, can still move us to the core. And any comparison between Howard Fast and Richard Wright should stop at the edge of genre. In Bigger Thomas, Wright created one of the great antiheroes of American literature; Fast was only a maker of progressive soap operas.

DENNING IS GUILTY of a different kind of reductionism in his chapter on Orson Welles, "one of the cultural monuments of the Popular Front era," as Irving Howe and Lewis Coser called him. The great fight against fascism gave the cultural front its most dramatic moments and perhaps its most lasting ones. Denning analyzes how Welles paid backhanded homage to the enemy's powers of persuasion. Ever the master showman, he and his collaborators in the Mercury Theatre made brilliant use of German and Italian images of harmonious masses and their hypnotic leaders. Denning understands Mercury's 1938 radio broadcast of "The War of the Worlds," the drama that millions mistook for breaking news, as an allegory of a fascist invasion. "The people invent their oppressors: they wish to believe in them," intones Welles's announcer after an unnamed city has fallen to huge Martian invaders who raise their arms in stiff salutes. Writes Denning, "Welles and the Mercury Theatre attempted to turn the magic of the Nazis against them."

The author contends that Welles's signature film, *Citizen Kane*, pursued the same goal in a different way—by exposing the hollowness of dictators. In the 1941 film, the autocratic but painfully insecure press mogul, modeled on both William Randolph Hearst and Henry Luce, isolates himself and destroys his political influence. Welles could not decide if he hated Kane or loved him—and that tension is still what makes the film so vital.

But does it live as a monument to the cultural front? John Howard Lawson, a blacklisted communist screenwriter, criticized *Citizen Kane* for treating the newspaper baron "with ironic sympathy. . . . It recognizes the dark forces in American society but avoids a direct challenge to those forces." Lawson had a point, one that might have given Denning

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pause.

Any formulaic "challenge" to Kane—perhaps by an ad hoc coalition of plebeian readers and underpaid journalists?—would have rung even falser than the saccharine endings of some of Frank Capra's films. *Citizen Kane* may have originated as a left-wing take on media Mussolinis, but its art transcends that time and its conflicts. To view Welles's heroic wretch, as Denning does, solely through the scrim of an "anti-fascist aesthetic" is to miss his far older cultural lineage. Kane's tragedy echoes the fatal quest of Captain Ahab and of a number of Shakespearean villains—particularly Macbeth and Richard III—who also engender the kind of empathy that comes from recognizing their human flaws. At times, Denning seems to conflate artists' left-wing politics with the sources and meaning of their art. He strains, for instance, to find Popular Front echoes in Billie Holiday's "God Bless the Child," citing its "working-class realism" and "utopian assertion." Then he notes that Holiday was "sustained by the audiences and institutions of the Popular Front." But since when has a songwriter needed the left to tell her that the poor need luck and perhaps a touch of divine intervention?

The very breadth of Denning's definition of the "cultural front" undermines his larger goal—to establish the staying power of this vast mélange of creative productions and political notions. To his credit, he describes how a multiracial left nourished artists like Holiday, Duke Ellington, and Dizzy Gillespie. They played at Pop Front events, and "virtually all of the major jazz critics of the period were on the left." But such details do little to explain the influence of swing and bebop on American popular culture.

In the end, Denning's passionate reclamation project claims too much for the artistic left. He laments that "Cold War repression [has] left a cultural amnesia," one that he hopes to remedy. But radicals in countries like Germany and Italy lost a good deal more than their jobs and reputations in the thirties and forties. Yet they kept their cultural legacy, and even some of their institutions, intact. The American left, to our eternal sorrow, never built a movement that large or that strong. As a result, "progressive" artists had less incentive to stand by the existing one in scoundrel times.

The qualities of durable art cannot be accounted for with an aesthetic like Denning's, which depends so resolutely on historical contingency. Take another look at *Yertle the Turtle*. The story ends with a stanza that would do any Popular Frontist proud: "And today the great Yertle, that marvelous he,/ Is King of the Mud. That is all he can see./ And the turtles, of course . . . all the turtles are free,/ As turtles and, maybe, all creatures should be." What's more, Theodor Geisel, unlike Dos Passos, never really changed his politics. Although he was not eager to acknowledge his Pop Front past, every decade or so Seuss would put out a book that updated its concerns. These included attacks on racism (*The Sneetches*), corporate pollution (*The Lorax*), and the nuclear arms race (*The Butter Battle Book*).

But it wasn't ideology that made Dr. Seuss the most influential children's author in the English language. What distinguishes *Yertle the Turtle* from any number of books that intend to teach kids moral lessons is its crisp meter, its brash humor, and its visual inventiveness. And Seuss had honed his craft under capitalist auspices. In the twenties and thirties, he drew ads for a bug spray manufactured by Standard Oil.

Seuss's work, like that of Holiday, Welles, and any fine artist, was fed by many streams of form and content. And it cut channels through American culture far deeper and more unpredictable than Denning's radical romanticism suggests. For all his intelligent and ferocious research, Denning misses the motive of his story: the left needed its artists more than its artists needed the left. ●

Index 1996 – 1997

Dissent is indexed in *Academic Abstracts*, the Infotrak Academic Index, *Magazine Article Summaries*, the *PAIS Bulletin*, University Microfilms, Inc. (UMI), the *Social Sciences Index*, and the *Social Science Source*. Readers and librarians who wish to receive a copy of the index for Volumes 43 and 44 of *Dissent* (Winter 1996 through Fall 1997) may write to *Dissent*, 521 Fifth Avenue, Suite 1700, N.Y., N.Y. 10017. Please include 55 cents postage.

MICHAEL KAZIN's latest book is *The Populist Persuasion: An American History.*

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Credit Past Due

Editors:

It was with great pleasure that I read the fine tribute to Meyer Schapiro in "The Artist and the Citizen," by Morris Dickstein. Then to learn on the Editor's Page of the forthcoming redesign of the magazine recalled the original cover of *Dissent* by Gandy Brodie, created at the behest of Meyer Schapiro. Never credited to the artist, it is to be hoped some of the quality of the human hand—and mind, signifying the meaning of *Dissent*—which characterized the original design, might no longer be absent from the new format.

With regard to the social values of Meyer Schapiro, "hard to reconstruct" from the recently published papers, I have always found the following to be conclusive: "the solidarity of artists with suffering and working humanity presupposes the solidarity of society with artists, but this is not possible until all men and not only the artist are free." The latter phrase reverberates through liberation literature, including Emma Lazarus on the Jew in America, reminding us that Meyer Schapiro was surely one of those "immigrant boys who came to worship" (in Irving Howe's immortal words), and to realize, in his life and work, America's promise.

Jocelyn Brodie
West Townshend, Vt.05359

Crime of the War on Drugs

Editors:

I was surprised and disappointed that none of the participants in the Fall 1997 Arguments exchanges on crime discussed the role of America's "War on Drugs" as a causal factor in our crime rates, whether up or down. Liberals and conservatives, in both major parties, have argued that a major cause of urban crime is the "War on Drugs." It is also the current excuse for violations of civil rights and applications of excessive force by our police. Of course, liberals and conservatives have both developed and supported it for eighty years.

Gerald M. Sutliff
Emeryville, Calif.

Errata

We apologize to Steven Vogel ("Grades as Money," Fall 1997) for mangling the title of his book. It is *Against Nature: The Concept of Nature in Critical Theory.*

In our last issue we neglected to credit Aaron Johnson, who worked as our editorial assistant during the summer.

RECENT AND FORTHCOMING BOOKS BY *DISSENT* EDITORS

Joanne Barkan, *A Tale of Two Sitters*. Lyrick Publishing. 1998.

David Bromwich, ed., *Edmund Burke on Politics, Representation, and Empire*. Yale University Press, 1998.

Randall Kennedy, *Race, Crime, and the Law*. Pantheon Books. 1997.

Nicolaus Mills, *The Triumph of Meanness: America's War Against Its Better Self*. Houghton Mifflin. 1997.

Jo-Ann Mort, ed., *The New Union Reader*. Verso Books. 1998.

Brian Morton, *Starting Out in the Evening*. Crown Publishers. 1998.

Carol O'Cleireacain, *The Orphaned Capital: Adopting the Right Revenues for the District of Columbia*. The Brookings Institution. 1997.

George Packer, *Central Square*. Graywolf. 1998.

Anson Rabinbach, *In the Shadow of Catastrophe: German Intellectuals Between Apocalypse and Enlightenment*. University of California Press. 1997.

James B. Rule, *Theory and Progress in Social Science*. The State University of New York Press. 1997.

Jim Sleeper, *Liberal Racism*, Viking Press. 1997.

Michael Walzer, *On Toleration*. Yale University Press. 1997.

Dennis H. Wrong, *The Modern Condition: Essays at Century's End*. Stanford University Press. 1998.

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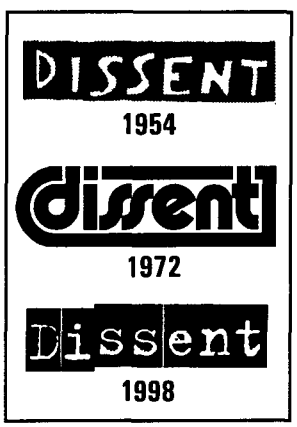
Some of us *Dissent*ers agitated year after year for a design overhaul and a new logo for the magazine. So I had high hopes when the revolution began last January, that is, when Michael Walzer, Mitchell Cohen, the staff, and I undertook the redesign project. I also anticipated conflict. We might agree on the big issues of democracy and freedom, but that didn't mean we'd see eye to eye on type fonts and cover layouts. *Au contraire*. *Dissent* had taught us to delve into nuances and disagree with each other. Just as we argued over the substance of foreign policy, we'd argue over the style of subheads.



To my surprise, our group almost always concurred on aesthetics. When presented with several designs for the Editor's Page, we all had the same first choice. When deciding between subtitles in serif or sans-serif type, we all preferred serif. We liked the same table-of-contents layout and spine treatment. For reasons of dumb luck (I'm sure it wasn't political), we operated mostly on a single design wavelength. The process turned out to be long and bumpy, but not because we clashed over design. The real problem was something else: fear of commitment.

Who would have guessed that leftists stubbornly dedicated to radical change in the distribution of power and wealth would clutch when asked to commit to a new type face? Ludicrous but true: for the first few months, we regularly got cold feet.

Take, for example, the new logo. Designer Daniel McClain showed us fifteen alternatives—an ample selection. Did we simply adopt the one that we all clearly liked? No, we worried: "Suppose there's some other logo, not yet created, that we'd like even better." We asked to see more options . . . in a variety of sizes, please.

Settling finally on our initial choice, did we charge forward to the next task? No. Co-editor Walzer confessed his attachment to the old logo. Of all the magazines displayed in the window of his local bookstore, only *Dissent* with its 1970s mastodon lettering was clearly recognizable *from across the street*. "Perhaps we shouldn't do anything rash . . ."

Meanwhile, we fretted over the reactions of our editorial board and readers. "Will they think the logo is too hip, too 'retro,' too bourgeois? Does any other magazine have a similar logo? What would this mean politically?"

Eventually Michael worked through his nostalgia; we came to terms with the improbability of unconditional support; we stood poised to move on . . . Then Executive Editor Brian Morton unearthed another concern: "We like the new logo now, but because of its trendiness, it might be quick to grow old."

We had strayed far from design and were struggling in the emotional arena. As soon as Brian spoke, I realized that getting *Dissent* restyled was like getting married. We suffered from prenuptial anxiety. "Suppose there's someone out there who'd be even better for me? Sure she's great, but my 'ex' looks pretty good, too. Maybe I'd be better off without a major life change. Even if I love him now, I might get bored later on. And what about the family? Will they like her?"

I knew our anxiety reflected the strength of our attachment to *Dissent*. Caring deeply about the magazine, we didn't want to undermine it in any way. Still, we had to face the facts: no guarantees in life, no warranties in graphic design. We needed a thought, a precept, a maxim to put the whole business back in perspective so we could finish our work. It came from Business Manager Simone Plastrik. Suppose we don't like the new logo after ten years? "So what?" Simone responded. "You hated the old one for fifteen."

-Joanne Barkan

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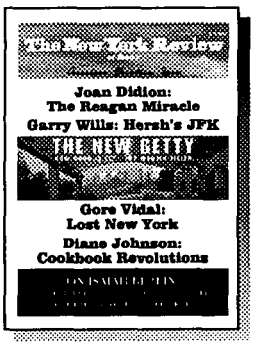

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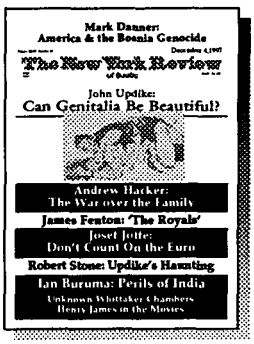

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